

BANDWAGON

**THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS
HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.**

MAY-JUNE 2001



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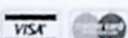
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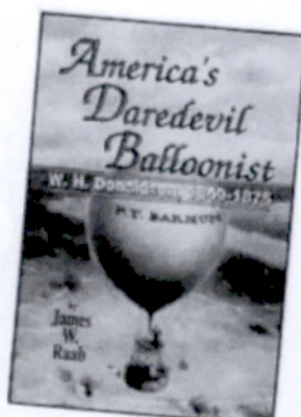
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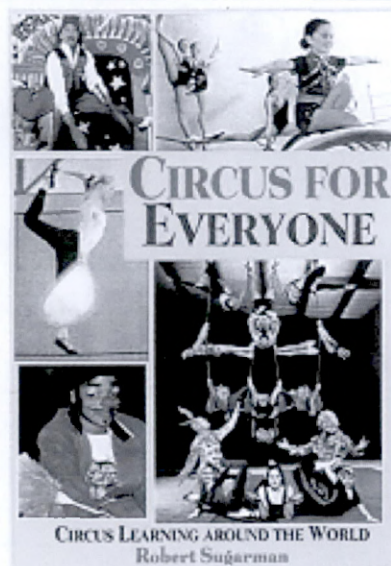
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The Life of Tiny Kline and The Evolution of Twentieth-Century American Mass Culture

By Janet Davis

Department of American Studies
and History. University of Texas
at Austin.

*This paper was presented at the
2000 Circus Historical Society con-
vention.*

As a small child in 1969, I eagerly looked forward to Sunday evenings. At 6:00 PM sharp, I curled up on our celery green shag carpet in front of the Sony Trinitron to watch "The Wonderful World of Disney." The effervescent aerial cartoon character, Tinker Bell, was an important part of this ritual because she opened the show. Tapping Sleeping Beauty's Castle with a light touch of her wand, Tinker Bell ignited the splashy fireworks over the Magic Kingdom that blazed into my living room. Little did I know, however, that just eight years earlier, a seventy-year-old woman had been the first to play the preternatural pixie in live performances at Disneyland. Dangling from a harness attached to a wire at the top of the 146-foot Matterhorn, she slid 784 feet to Sleeping Beauty's Castle, where she initiated the live fireworks extravaganza, "Fantasy in the Sky."

This remarkably agile four foot, ten inch woman was named Tiny Kline. A study of her life takes us on a journey through the mean streets of New York City in 1905, burlesque joints, ice skating revues, the three-ring railroad circus, movies, thrill shows and Disney. It is the story of a tough, determined, cheerful immigrant who assimilated into American society, who knitted socks for U.S. servicemen during World War I (alongside her colleagues on the Big Show) and participated in the war effort, most likely as a translator, during World War II. It is also a story that elucidates the trajectory of twentieth-century American popular entertainment: away from the dance

hall, urban amusement park, movie palace, circus, and the ballpark (i.e. forms that were well-integrated into public spaces), to suburban theme parks bounded by highways and other amusements that had become highly isolated from the urban center.

Kline came to the United States from Hungary in 1905, as part of the flood of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe seeking prosperity in the booming industrial economy. Of the twenty-three million people who immigrated to the United States between 1890 and 1924, seventeen million began their new lives at the port of New York, just as Kline did.¹

Named Tina Helen Deutsch at the time, she was just fourteen years old and a member of a Hungarian dance troupe.²

She had no guardian. Like hundreds of other young Jewish immigrant girls, Kline quickly found refuge at the Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, also known as the

Tiny Kline on Barnum & Bailey in 1918. Circus World Museum collection.



Clara de Hirsch Home for Friendless Immigrants. Kline's experiences must have been overwhelmingly positive there, because she left ninety percent of her estate to the Home's successor, the Young Men & Women's Hebrew Association, "in gratitude for taking custody of me when I came to America as a minor, in 1905, having no guardian."³

Incorporated in 1897, the Clara de Hirsch Home was part of the landscape of progressive-era reform. Like other philanthropic organizations targeted at young, working-class immigrant women, the Home's Board of Directors trained its charges to become economically self-sufficient and morally resilient.⁴

Its certificate of incorporation included the following objectives: "...to improve their mental, moral and physical condition, and train them for self-support; to instruct them to become domestic servants; to provide industrial training...to provide them with opportunities for industrial, social and moral improvement."⁵ In general, progressive reformers considered urban spaces to be dangerous for impressionable girls: cheap nickel dumps (movie theaters), dance halls, dime museums, skating rinks, and amusement parks like Coney Island were all places where working-class teen-agers freely mingled without adult supervision.

Yet Tina Helen Deutsch would become an integral part of this rollicking, titillating world of public amusement within six years of her arrival. In the summer of 1911, she was a burlesque dancer in Altoona, Pennsylvania. Thereafter, she played vaudeville, performed as a side show cooch dancer, and worked as an ice skater with men in drag. But burlesque, in her words, was her "forte," specifically an "Oriental dance specialty."⁶ Robert Allen argues that burlesque had been a mass entertainment in the late 1860s when it

arrived from London—i.e. an amusement whose audiences represented different social classes. Burlesquers spoke, and made fun of contemporary politics and Victorian gender norms. However, the initial mass appeal of burlesque led to its downfall, because middle-class reformers worried about its widespread corrupting influence. Banned from “legitimate” theaters, burlesque quickly moved to the all-male world of the concert saloon and its female performers soon lost their voice, simply serving as objects of sexual display in the early twentieth century.⁷

Like thousands of other “new” immigrants, Kline sought to assimilate, and increase her chances in life with a new name. She probably sought to remove all traces of her Hungarian Jewish identity in a society that was often hostile to immigrants, particularly those from Italy and eastern Europe who seemed culturally—indeed racially—different from native-born white Americans; thus Deutsch called herself Tina Duchee as a performer. In her unpublished memoirs, Kline later stated that she made the name change in order to appear more “glamorous,” but the decision quickly backfired.

“One thing funny about show people: they never pass up an opportunity of wise-cracking, especially at the expense of, —or to annoy—the other fellow, making ... her ... a target for ridicule. No sooner did I join a unit, a production or vaudeville act, on hearing my name Duchee for the first time it immediately suggested something to poke fun at and from that very day everybody with the company called me ‘douche-bag.’ I abhorred [sic] it but there was nothing I could do about it; once it got started I couldn’t stop it—my very closest associates would call me thus—anywhere I happened to be, and the more I’d protest the funnier the situation it created so after a while I’d just ignore it till I joined another company and the cycle started all over anew.”⁸

Consequently—after the “douche-bag” debacle, Kline was thrilled to take the name of her new husband—world champion Wild West rider Otto Kline—in 1915. Sometime thereafter, she assumed the name “Tiny,” owing

to her diminutive size, but also as a playful, redundant pun because Kline meant tiny in Yiddish and German.

Long after Kline had “made good” as an aerial performer, she vividly remembered her marginal position in the seamy, male-only world of burlesque and the cooch show in her memoirs. Working at the crowded side show “annex” at Arlington & Beckman’s Oklahoma Ranch Wild West show in 1913, she recalled that men made cat-calls, jostled each other to get a better view of her, and occasionally tried to grope her:

“W. A. (as we called Mr. Shannon) [the spieler] would start his ‘spiel’ saying: ‘Gather ‘round me a little closer, men, don’t want the ladies to hear this, but you are about to get a little treat inside this curtain ... etc.’ and that was when we’d give them the flash to help the sale. The place filled up in no time; we could hear the wise-cracks and otherwise ‘smart’ remarks, from behind still another curtain—our dressing-room—as they gathered in anticipation of seeing ‘those muscles shake and shiver like a bowl of jelly in a gale of wind; the dance that John the Baptist lost his head over’ (Shannon’s sales line). On a short shrill note of the flageolet—the signal—I came out first, climbed up to the platform which was roped off all around for protection against the impudence of the standing audience who might make a grab at our limbs (which they sometimes tried anyway) I went into my dance, a short routine of about two minutes duration, doing high kicks and the ‘split’ which was then, considered ‘naughty.’ There wasn’t anything in that music to

Kline was a cooch dancer in the 1913 Arlington & Beckmann wild west side show. Pfening Archives.



inspire dance spirit within me, I could never ‘feel’ the mood, nor figure out the timing.⁹

Kline departed from this exclusively male popular cultural province when she joined the Barnum and Bailey Circus in 1916, first as a statue girl, then as a standing Roman rider for the next two years. Starting in 1919, she became a flyer and iron jaw performer. She, like many other female players, got her start in the circus through a familial connection: her husband Otto had been a Wild West rider for Barnum and Bailey. The couple first met in the lunch car while both worked for the Arlington & Beckmann Wild West in 1913. They courted for two years before they finally married in New York City in 1915 while Otto performed at Madison Square Garden and Tiny danced for the Cracker Jack Burlesque Company and at New York City’s “Academy of Music.” Kline was blissful in the immediate five weeks after her marriage. She and Otto planned for her to quit her dancing jobs and join the circus. Her colleagues on the chorus line teased her and crocheted baby booties for her as she counted the days until Barnum and Bailey began their season on the road. Unfortunately, Kline’s euphoria ended quickly. After the finale on April 21, 1915, her stone-faced manager handed her the following telegram message: “Otto Kline died today. For disposal of remains advise immediately. Frank A. Cook/ Care Barnum and Bailey Circus.”¹⁰

Her husband had been killed in a riding accident. Tiny was grief-stricken, and never re-married; instead, she kept working, this time with the circus.

In joining the circus, Kline became a part of an entertainment that had self-consciously defined itself as “respectable” and “moral,” particularly since the late nineteenth century. Other live, mass amusements made similar claims as they sought to broaden their audience base to include middle-class families with increased leisure time in the maturing industrial economy; yet, as Alison Kibler has argued in a recent book, vaudeville, for one, was rife with inter-

nal strife among proprietors like B. F. Keith and performers regarding the image—respectable or bawdy—that they wished to convey.¹¹

The three-ring railroad circus had marketed itself explicitly to families since the 1870s when P. T. Barnum re-entered the circus business in earnest. Showmen emphasized (with a wink) that the display of muscular (albeit scantily clad) athletes, and trained exotic animals was educational, and morally uplifting family fare. On one level, these claims about wholesome, safe fun were dubious because the crowded circus show grounds were potentially dangerous places (particularly at night) where drunken male spectators gambled, picked fights, or leered blatantly at seminude circus women. Yet, on another level, impresarios' ostensible mission to "instruct the minds of all classes," (in the words of a Barnum and Bailey program) succeeded because the circus, unlike other mass forms was not a target of purity reform during the Progressive era, despite its titillating bodily performances.

Kline's memoir provides an intimate glimpse at circus life: its caste system, itinerant character, sexual morays, and structural evolution during the twentieth century. At the circus, Kline was excruciatingly self-conscious about her "low" past. She keenly felt every slight, every snub from other performers who occupied a higher position on the circus's social hierarchy. Kline remembered that the size of one's trunk, the position one occupied in the congested dressing tent, reflected one's position in the social hierarchy. According to Kline, "Indeed, the place of your trunk determined who you were." Kline's fellow statue girls—covered in greasy white paint—were isolated from the other performers in a small, far-away corner of the women's dressing tent, while elite bareback riders and aerialists positioned their trunks along the first row against the tent's partition wall.¹² At her first Fourth of July celebration with Barnum and Bailey—a day which social hierarchies supposedly vanished—Kline was drafted to dance for the women because, "word had



This ad for Kline appeared in the July 24, 1933 *Billboard*. Circus World Museum collection.

gotten around that I could shake a 'wicked' hip."¹³ Even after Kline had "moved up" in the hierarchy in 1919 when she began performing as a revolving trapeze artist, she still felt that others treated her as an "interloper." Fred Bradna, the Ringling Brothers & Barnum and Bailey's equestrian director told Kline not to stand on the ring-curb to take her bow because super-star bareback rider May Wirth already used that "styling."¹⁴ After performing on the rings in 1919, Kline incurred the wrath of sometimes-friend Lillian Leitzel who was outraged to find Kline's rings already set up (off to the side) before Leitzel's act. Leitzel fumed and scolded, and Kline had an epiphany: she decided to leave the rings to Leitzel and stick to the iron-jaw and trapeze.¹⁵

For the next four decades, Kline crafted her trademark iron jaw breakaway act, the "slide for life," and she billed as the "World's most sensational aerial daredevil." The iron jaw was popular with trapeze performers looking to make themselves more salable. Best of all, the iron jaw required no rigging other than a rope and pulley. Yet the learning process was excruciating:

"...once the extreme agony of the first two weeks' practice is lived through, during the next two weeks there would be a gradual tapering off of the pain in the eyes, nose and jaw, the temples would also cease that hammering sensation. The vertebrae that made that cracking-sound in the back of the neck every time the mouth took the weight of the body, would be quite silent by the third week—the obnoxious smell of the strap and the flavor of tannic-acid

[sic], the only lingering elements remaining."¹⁶

Kline's life was peripatetic until she settled in California in 1938. She wintered in Cuba doing an elephant act. She fell in love with a Cuban pharmacist who jilted her the next year—poisoned by nasty rumors spread by Tiny's jealous boyfriend. She lived periodically in Cuba, working as a dance instructor in Havana.

She performed intermittently for American circuses. She did an occasional "frolic," or burlesque date (including a week at a house on skid row in November, 1927—"which wasn't as bad as I expected.") Kline worked on Broadway in Billy Rose's 1935 production, "Jumbo." She did movie roles. And, throughout, Kline played outdoor thrill shows. In October 1932, Kline made international headlines after she did her "slide for life" over Broadway—from a sign atop the Edison Hotel to the Palace Theatre roof; in the summer of 1933, she appeared as the "Zep Girl," performing aerial acrobatics from a blimp hovering over the Steel Pier at Atlantic City. These thrilling exhibitions of Kline seemingly conquering modern technology like countless contemporary aerial circuses (containing female acrobats dangling from airplanes) were highly popular in a predominantly urban and industrial society increasingly smitten with speed and flight in the 1920s and 1930s.

Tiny remained a perceptive witness to the social and economic forces that were changing the circus in her lifetime. She saw the circus participate in the trend toward monopoly formation that characterized the twentieth-century entertainment industry: vaudeville, movie theaters in conjunction with production companies, and radio also limited the playing field by creating monopolies. Working for Barnum and Bailey at the time of the show's merger with the Ringling Brothers circus, Kline noted:

"Not a day went by without some excitement, arguing over trivialities; we, the Barnum people, felt that the other gang was there by the grace of kindness from us, whereas, the Ringling bunch was under the illu-

sion that we were the poor orphans that needed adoption, letting us know it in no uncertain terms. It was confusing. During the first week the Garden was like an arsenal of explosives, with every one trying to avoid friction, then, gradually, each got bolder—stood his ground, that his side is in the power.”¹⁷

This 1919 merger was part of a larger trend. At the turn of the twentieth century, nearly a hundred different circuses roamed around America; by 1956, that number had dwindled to thirteen shows, the majority of which were owned by Ringling Brothers & Barnum and Bailey.¹⁸

Kline also saw changes in the ways that the masses of casual labor dealt with low wages and exhausting working conditions: the commonest form of protest in the old days was simply to quit. But in the context of the industrial union movement in the 1930s, workingmen began to organize collectively. Kline personally felt the impact of the massive Depression-era strike waves. She performed on the Al G. Barnes Circus's final tour in 1938—where she faced a humiliating lay-off with pay (but no dismissal) prompted by a spate of sympathy strikes after the Scranton, Pennsylvania walk-out at the Big Show. Despite charges of intractability from a few of her co-workers on the show, Kline refused to appear in the parade, or the spectacle in lieu of her regular act, because her contract stipulated that she was a featured act: “No, I owned an apparatus; boss of my own act,—classified as a private contractor...”¹⁹

Kline also observed the impact of the changing postwar landscape upon the circus. In 1948, she noted that the Greatest Show on Earth had become more compact when she visited the circus's grounds in Los Angeles. No longer did the show spread out magnificently over nine acres. The big top was smaller. Given the explosion of postwar suburbs, highway networks, and the “Baby Boom,” open areas relatively near

the urban core had become rare. Costuming and music had also become standardized at this new circus, which, in Kline's mind, was more polished, like “Broadway” rather than the idiosyncratic costuming and comportment of old. Ultimately, she viewed this new circus to be a “production rather than a circus.” She was doubly shocked to see that titillation played an even bigger role that it had in her day with the Big Show; she sat stunned as voluptuous “show girls” performed a dance number with male dwarfs, and half-naked women rode in a rocking, undulating motion with legs spread atop elephants.²⁰

Tiny waxed nostalgic for the more “wholesome” days of the early twentieth century: “...it is, my humble opinion, a lamentable state of affairs,—almost a sacrilege—to the noble institution, so typically American, so dear to the heart of every child and grown-up, who remembers the circus as the first big thrill of his life.”²¹

Yet the world of movies, radio, automobiles, airplanes, electricity, and television made consumers infinitely more sophisticated than the turn-of-the-century audiences who had thrilled to see a live elephant. Gone were the days, according to Kline, when “Miss Electra” could sit in a mildly electrified chair at the sideshow and shock and mystify her audience to great affect.²²

Moreover, television, in particular, complemented the increasingly privatized “homeward bound” lifestyle of suburban Americans during the Cold War, an ethos that was increasingly antithetical to older public amusements like the circus, baseball and grand urban movie palaces.²³ Sparked by low-interest mortgages through the 1944 G. I. Bill, and inexpensive, mass-produced housing stock, millions of white families packed up their belongings and headed to the suburbs while minority families moved into the urban housing stock recently vacated by the new suburbanites. Racial fear was,

then, an important reason for white suburbanites' reluctance to return to the urban environment for fun. Deindustrialization and capital flight hastened the transformation of the city and its once-vibrant popular forms.

After the 1940s, Kline lived at her tidy home in Inglewood, California, working periodic local thrill acts,” including a televised slide for life across the Los Angeles Coliseum in 1948. Although her body remained strong and capable, Kline noticed that her opportunities in the increasingly youth-crazed entertainment industry were shrinking because of her age. Leroy Prince, dance director for the 1940 film, *Road to Singapore*, starring Bing Crosby, Dorothy Lamour and Bob Hope, flatly refused to consider Kline for an iron jaw number.

“When I explained the affect while in the air, he still wouldn't buy.—[sic] I couldn't understand it; dressed so trim, (by the way, my hair was still black then) ... I wondered if I should remind him of the American Legion show, he directed in Havana, Cuba, in the early spring of 1927, in which I also participated ...”²⁴ Ironically, Kline's last big act came playing the ageless Tinker Bell at Disneyland from 1961-1963.

Ascending to the top of the Matterhorn, Kline put on her harness, attached her rigging, quietly stepped out onto a ledge and waited, wand in hand, for the spot lights to shine on her. Suddenly illuminated, Kline waved to the crowd and slid into space toward Sleeping Beauty's Castle: Kline observed, “I can actually feel the thousands ... staring at me from the sea of faces below.”²⁵

Opened in 1955 at Anaheim, California, Disneyland was an essential part of the suburbanizing, postwar landscape—precisely the same landscape that helped displace the gargantuan tented railroad circus of old. Citing rising labor costs, logistical difficulties and falling audiences, John Ringling North decided to tear down the canvas tents once and for all in 1956 and moved his show to air-conditioned indoor arenas. Disneyland's highly regulated, spotless environment and expensive ticket prices catered to white, middle-class, suburban consumers, and pro-



vided a startling contrast to the cheap, mass world of public amusement where Tiny Kline came of age as a burlesque dancer at the turn of the century. Historian David Nasaw notes that Disneyland and other new suburban, or exurban amusement parks were isolated from the urban environment, located off major highways, or in the case of Disneyland, surrounded by "a twenty-foot earthen wall ... almost deliberately obscured from public view as if announcing that the space within did not wish to be a part of the city."²⁶ In this social milieu, grand old movie palaces, theaters, baseball parks and amusement parks across the nation crumbled, were condemned, and torn down.

Tiny Kline died of cancer on July 5, 1964, at the age of 73 at a hospital in Los Angeles. There was a brief obituary in *Variety*, but otherwise, the passing of this Hungarian Jewish American woman whose life experiences mirrored key cultural transformations in the United States went unnoticed. The dynamic world of Kline's old haunts along Times Square had also died by 1964. Peep shows and prostitutes now dominated this once-vibrant (albeit always seedy) urban landscape where Kline had danced, ice-skated and triumphantly slid through the air by her teeth.

Yet, in the 1990s, an ironic thing happened. The Walt Disney Corporation (among other apostles of the New Urbanism) turned its sights away from the suburbs, toward Times Square, as a way to capitalize on growing public nostalgia for exciting, pedestrian-friendly urban spaces. In 1995, Disney bought and renovated the old New Amsterdam theater to show its own productions like "The Lion King," and also purchased new retail space to house its Disney Store. Giant superstore now dot the urban landscape while NASDAQ, ABC-TV, Disney-TV and Morgan Stanley have located their corporate headquarters there.²⁷ Consequently, rental space has become the sixth priciest in the world; a night at Times Square (including Broadway tickets and lodging) can typically run \$600.00. A city zoning law mandates that no more than 40% of adult stores'



Tiny Kline on Polack Bros. Circus in 1941. Pfening Archives

materials can be pornographic.²⁸ Proponents like History Professor Kenneth T. Jackson argue, "... personally, I think the neighborhood's character has improved significantly. A grandmother should be able to take her granddaughter to a play in Times Square and not be assaulted by signs that say 'Nude Girls!'"²⁹ But critics counter that the area has become standardized and sanitized into "the Great Whitewashed Way."³⁰ Thus, at the turn of the twenty-first century, the transformation of Tiny Kline's world has come full circle, touching the site of her earliest beginnings in America. Although the area has been become safer for the thousands of pedestrians who walk through Kline's old haunts every hour, its diverse "cheap amusements," small businesses, and shared public spaces are gone.

NOTES

1. Elizabeth Ewen, *Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars: Life and Culture on the Lower East Side, 1890-1925* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1985), 21.
2. "Tinker Bell Brings Never-Never Land to Disneyland," *News from Disneyland* (press release), 1962, 1. Citation courtesy Rebecca Cline, Walt Disney Company Archives.
3. Tiny Kline, "My Will and Testament," January 28, 1963, Superior Court of the

State of California for the County of Los Angeles, County Records Center, Los Angeles, California.

4. Clara de Hirsch was the German Jewish baroness (who had never been to the United States) who founded and provided major funding for her eponymous charitable organization.

4. Harvey Green, *Fit for America: Health, Fitness, Sport and American Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 246.

5. Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls, pamphlet, "Extract from Certificate of Incorporation of the Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls," 1897, 4, The 92nd Street Y, New York, New York, citation courtesy of Steven W. Siegel, Library Director and Archivist.

6. Tiny Kline, "Showground-Bound," unpublished manuscript, 58, courtesy of Fred Dahlinger, Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin.

7. Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

8. Ibid, 95.

9. Ibid, 102-103.

10. Ibid, 85.

11. M. Alison Kibler, *Rank Ladies: Gender and Cultural Hierarchy in American Vaudeville* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), introduction.

12. Kline, *Showground-Bound*, 154-155.

13. Ibid, 267.

14. Ibid, 357-358.

15. Ibid, 364-365.

16. Ibid, 313.

17. Ibid, 356.

18. Marcello Truzzi, "The Decline of the American Circus: The Shrinkage of an Institution," in *Sociology and Everyday Life*, M. Truzzi, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), 315, 319.

19. Kline, *Showground-Bound*, 426.

20. Ibid, 453-468.

21. Ibid, 466.

22. Ibid, 106.

23. See Elaine Tyler May, *Home-ward Bound* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

24. Kline, *Showground-Bound*, 430.

25. "News from Disneyland," 1.

26. David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 254.

27. Josh Getlin, "Ball has Dropped on Seedy Times Square," *Los Angeles Times*, December 30, 1998, Part A, 1.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Gary A. Warner, "Times Square now 'Great Whitewashed Way,'" (*Phoenix Arizona Republic*, July 27, 1997, Part T, 14.

Showground Bound

Where Caste Is Observed: According To Rank and Rating

By Tiny Kline

Tiny Kline appeared in the spec and statue act on Barnum & Bailey in 1916.

Presently Mabel led me though the flap to the right, that sanctuary, called "dressing room" the only place the circus performer can call home during the tour; it in where he or she spends all the spare time through the day—from the early hours in the morning after leaving the coaches, until getting back to them after the night show. That 3 x 3 feet space is private property, as rightfully his or hers as if holding a deed to it, and that right is respected by the others during the activities requiring one's presence outside, nobody infringes by sitting on the chair or even take a peek in the mirror of the other in his or her absence; that space before each one's trunk. One's domain.

I shall start by describing the physical structure of this the most important department of the entire institution, in order to bring out a true picture of the scheme in the set up. A three pole top, oblong in shape and quite large in proportion, this tent was made of terra cotta colored canvas, the reason for it, no doubt, to eliminate translucence or silhouettes delighting the loiterers outside at night with the artificial light casting shadows over lighter canvas, of the people dressing or undressing. Contrary to the arrangement of entrance to the cook house at the broad side, the entrance to the dressing room was at the end side, (the one nearest to the back-door of the big top). A high partition-wall of the same colored canvas, which was tied up to the poles, running

through the center lengthwise—from one end to the other—dividing the room, men to the left, ladies to the right side. Entering the ladies sides, there were large tables jacked up on saw-horses across the front following the entrance, a few immense trunks and a couple of sewing machines, comprising the wardrobe department where the three women distributed the costumes for parade and spec.

Directly beyond the tables, machines, etc. was where the actual dressing room started. Looking toward the rear, the performers' trunks were arranged end to end in four straight rows, starting from the wardrobe department to the far end. The first row backed against the partition wall, the next row directly opposite with a seven foot distance between forming an aisle. Both rows of trunks when opened faced toward the center of this aisle and it was here that one could appreciate the class distinction of the performers, for it was between these two rows of trunks—this first aisle where the

Inside the Barnum & Bailey Circus ladies dressing room. All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives.

"aristocrats" those top-notch ladies with the circus dressed. Their trunks placed significantly according to their rating starting with the bare-back riders to the left, backed against the partition, and the aerial performers on the right hand side. When the lids of their trunks were up it placed them in a simulated private dressing room, shut off from the second aisle. Of course, the farther down this queens' row led, so did the rank of the performers; decreasing in importance still more when their trunks started with the third row which were placed backed against the second row with just sufficient space between, so the lids may be opened against each other. The fourth row was set against the outer side wall, the space between this and the third row forming the second aisle, or main thoroughfare, so to speak. It was through this aisle that all the traffic passed and through which we, the statue girls, reached our little sanctum, a small wedge at the extreme far end of the tent, completely isolated from the others by another partition. By the time the fourth row group was classified it was reduced to the riffraff caste; the statue girls still lower, they were looked upon as interlopers.

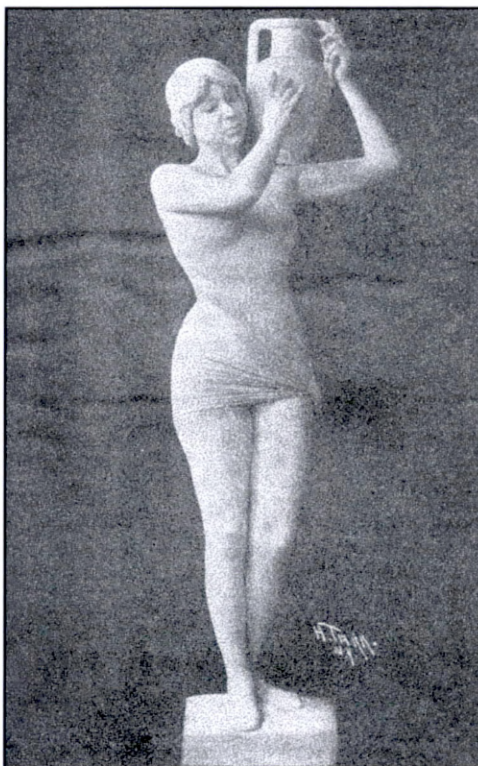
The performers in the second aisle and especially the ones whose trunks were placed against the outer wall, were at a terrific disadvantage, not so much for the lack of privacy with every one passing bumping against their chairs, as regards the weather conditions being exposed to the elements of



wind and rain from over and under the side wall. If that weren't punishment enough, here is the pay-off: there was a space left vacant for all the ladies to duck out under the side wall, to hang out their washing on a line they'd string between a guy line and wagon left nearby, or between two guy lines, and last but not least—this was also the way to that little "comfort station" erected almost directly against and facing the side wall. This little project, commonly referred to as "donniker" (in circus parlance) accommodating six persons—would have stumped even the famous Chick Sale for ingenuity and speedy construction, yet, it met all the requirements of the sanitation laws then existing. It was here, in the intimacy, owing to the nature of this department—where "queen" and "lowbrow" sat side by side within touching distance, where everybody was reduced to equal standing.

Indeed, the place of your trunk determined who you were. And while I only describe the side of the ladies lay-out, the same applied to the men on the other side of the partition. The same class distinction (except the statue girls' rating . . . none existent there). The lowest rank of the male performer is held by the clown, unless of course he happens to happens to have something to elevate him above the average, with international fame, like Marcelino who held the spotlight a few years prior period I am referring to, having retired while still a feature attraction and later opened a restaurant with equal success.

The reason I make an issue of these minute details is to bring to light the psychological facts generally ignored by the public, yet, they are the very vibration of life to these men and women who make circus performing their life-long career. The only social life they know lies behind that curtain through which you see them enter in the big top to do their work; social codes and and etiquette which they, themselves enact and abide by, evincing the possibility of living in the same room with—nevertheless, retain their dignity and aloofness—above those they consider their inferiors, in priority first, and



Ena Claren, the head statue lady on Barnum & Bailey.

merit of performance, in second place.

Having reached the far end of this corridor-shaped room as described and making our way through the loose end of the partition which was to shut us off from view of the other ladies, Mabel said, "Now this is our dressing room." I looked about, there seemed hardly room for all those trunks scattered about in in disorder, left standing on ends, for each to pick out her place—whom she wants to be next, or between. Mabel, having arrived there early, had already placed hers, against the partition nearest the exit. The only other trunk arranged in place, with clothes rack already set up along side of it, even to a small board platform on the ground in front of the trunk—so precise, it caught my eyes, there it stood across the inner corner—like a sentinel and quite in contrast with the others, its imposing size: 30 inches, a privilege given only to performers who own and carry their wardrobe, while all the others were of the uniform size allotted to these non "ranking ladies." To my remark on this points Mabel explained that she was the head statue lady, all three groups

under her direction. She arranged the various poses, replicas from famous statuary. "So she's going to be my boss" I thought as I read the lettering on her trunk "Ena Claren, Statues." Evidently someone looking after her interest had already been on the job to spot her place. I picked out my trunk and dragging it over, setting it next to Mabel's. I already felt at home.

The show was to remain a whole week in Philadelphia. This first stand under canvas fixes the permanent place one is to have in the cook house; grouping them according to rank, class and department. Side show people at their own table, the ushers and ticket sellers, the musicians, the wild west performers, all are placed at tables corresponding to their particular group; each individual assigned to one particular place, one waiter to serve about 24 persons is about average. This was also to be the only time I had to juggle my own trunk in place, for, at this stand, during the week—after everybody in settled. Mickey Graves with his painter assistant, goes over every trunk putting a number on each, in consecutive order as they are spotted in the dressing rooms. Each dressing room with its own series, thus Paldren troupe LDR 52. There were man in the Paldren troupe as well as women, therefore, the LDR which stands for Ladies Dressing Room, takes care of where to leave it. The number takes it next to the trunk of proximity. Ours, of course, were marked "Statues." MDR for men's, the numbers there on determine the spot they would be placed all through the season. They are always facing in the proper direction to get at. The number system so efficient—the property men handle things with much accuracy that on the second-stand, after one gets inside the dressing room, there is no apparent change. It is hard to believe the show is in a different town—that things have been moved at all,

Other dressing rooms for performers were located in a separate top assigned to the wild west people whose performance on the road was sold to the public as an after-show, in front of the grandstand; a means of cashing in on the time while the

workmen were taking down the other seats and aerial riggings with other equipment. The reason for the separate tent arrangement was chiefly a time-saver in getting off the lot; by the time the after show—referred to as “concert” was over, the big dressing room was no longer there; trunks all loaded in their corresponding wagons, canvas and poles taken down and gone; only the puddles of water from the wash-buckets as the property men emptied and stacked them into each other before loading them, marked the place that had been the scene of the greatest combination of community-hall, private home and glamorizing parlor, earlier. The concert was an idea developed by the dean of showmen, P. T. Barnum’s, on observing the keen interest shown by the public to watch the army of workmen tearing down the big top; hanging around after the show. These curious folks scattered all over the lot not only hindered the men at work but constituted a menace of possible injury to themselves by a falling pole or the likes, he hit upon a solution which not only kept these idlers out of the way in an orderly manner but paid off handsomely in cash dividends as well.

His scheme consisted of having the band shift to the grandstand side, and remain after the regular performance to play a few selections of the latest waltzes—the rhythm of the current trend in music—he announced that all who wished to remain to watch the “show” being disintegrated could occupy grandstand seats and hear a concert as well, by paying a small additional fee. It was a happy venture, meeting with instantaneous success. Later song and dance numbers were added, even a minstrel show, anything to stimulate the ticket sales. Still later when the rodeo attracted the public’s attention to the extent that it grew to be a stiff competition to the circus itself. Something had to be done about it and was. Mr. Barnum is dead and gone, other clever showmen carried on. One of them conceived the enterprising plan to bring this new “thriller”—the wild west show—to the circus; incorporate it and sell it as an additional attraction in the



Ella Bradna in the ladies dressing room.

after show which, to this day, retains the name, concert.

To see a show of this nature presented at a great disadvantage, handicapped by lack of space on the narrow track, with the performers caution-minded of hazards of tangling with guy lines and rigging which were beings lowered which they might be dashed while riding an irrational bronc, the rodeo fans soon were bored rather than amused, losing interest in that branch of entertainment. Hence today the 100% wild west shows such as Buffalo Bill, the 101 Ranch, and the Oklahoma Ranch, are only memories of yesterday’s passing parade.

The small square dressing top, referred to as “hooligan” (for obvious reason, there being no class distinction among its occupants) had a three-way division, each compartment with a separate entrance, formed by over-all side wall at the corners which needed no lettering, the one nearest to the backyard was invariably the cowgirl’s side, the cowboys’ directly opposite the partition from the girls. The third compartment was occupied by the Chinese troupe of eleven males.

The system of placing trunks with mark and number as in the big dressing room applied here as well; WWM for the wild west men, WWW

for the women; the Chinese characters for names put or by their owners, were numbered, however, for places.

Not that they didn’t rate as performers to be in the big dressing room; the Chinese were happier dressing, out here in the “hooligan” all by themselves, since hardly any of them spoke English, besides, here they could brew their pungent aromatic herbs cook their favorite dishes when the cook house didn’t satisfy their appetite or taste, and here too, none kicked about the stench of the fish they strung out on a clothesline to ripen and dry in the sun. I often wondered what ever could they relish about such delicacy as sweet and sour fish. And here they could give vent to their grievance, fighting among themselves—knifing each other, almost to death—had it not been for the timely intervention of the cowboys at such events. Whenever they would stop that sing-song chatter and all was quiet so could hear a pin drop, those cowboys knew there is something rotten besides the fish, going on in there, rushing in on them—West meeting East—they put an end to that sanguinary “Saber-dance” by quelling the feud, taking the injured one to the doctor’s—by force—to get his wounds dressed. A peculiar custom of theirs—all talking at once and at the same time—and most all the time—a sudden dead silence reigning, was ominous. There was a thousand-dollar bond put up by the show with the immigration authorities for each one of them and while they seldom were a source of trouble, they had to be watched for their own protection.

Their interpreter, as well as manager, a Chinaman, called Pat Murphy, was one of the most lovable characters I have ever known. Murphy an ex-performer of magic, was a natural comique. Americanized as he could ever be, still retained his queue, which he like his compatriots, wore draped around his cranium, even the Ja-Ced, brown stumps, left of what once were teeth, along the gum-line, seemed to have been a part contributing to the individuality that made up this unforgettable personality. He spoke in pidgin English, as is affected by imperson-

ators of his race. Many times I wondered if this be just another expression of the jester within him. His attire half Oriental-half-Occidental, always wearing a shellacked silk coat and black shoes with soft platform soles, typical of his native land. A simple man, yet one who seemed to reflect the spirit of Confucius beneath that self-effacement could there have been a great philosopher?

Frugality his ruling principle, he was slue-footed or some impediment affecting his feet, dating back perhaps to those vaudeville days when, as a magician, he would produce a huge goldfish bowl—seemingly out of thin air, filled with water and fish swimming around in same. What the trick had to do with breaking down his feet is just this: that bowl he carried, strapped to his waist hanging down between his legs and concealed under the traditional "Mandarin" coat, a loose, full-skirted garment, was mighty heavy and put quite a strain on his arches, especially if he held this trick as a closing feature. His feet became permanently infirmed as a result. Yet, he would walk from train to lot and vice versa at night, even with transportation available, a distance of over three miles. Sometimes there he'd be trudging along, both feet turned out words, as if each wanted to go in separate directions.

He was best known for his blaspheming, but coming from him it sounded cute. Most familiar of his exclamations were: "Col' like hollie," or "Hoc' like helli." "No dam good" and "Dam too lon' walk. One could associate him only with these expressions, the limit of his conversation. Everybody on the show knew and loved Pat Murphy, the Chinaman; a fine example of those sons of the East.

Of the others—there must have been over forty of them (the entire arena, three rings and four stages seemed filled with them during their number) only three had wives; Siberian-born Caucasian women who spoke only Russian. All three participated in their husbands' troupes. Every time I passed their places in



The 1916 Barnum & Bailey big top. Two hundred feet wide and five hundred ten feet long.

the second aisle against the outer wall I stopped to admire their kaleidoscopic costumes; especially attractive were those glittering tiaras—the head-dresses they wore—like beautiful fans with gaudy tassels at the sides. The whole ensemble created a gorgeous picture, dressing the scene just standing there in the background, while the men would go through their intricate tumbling and tortuous poses. I simply marveled at one of them in particular, who performed atop a high pedestal with only a square foot surface, actually rolling himself up like a snail, seemingly having hinges even to his leg bones. All of them stressed on contortion work bending both ways, backward and forward; and that's not all. While going through these impossible flexures of body, their minds concentrated on juggling plates over the points of sticks of straw-thinness. These fellows just kept them spinning, two or three in each hand—it seemed unbelievable, for, either trick was an outstanding feat in itself. Their secret: practice, practice from morn till night, every spare minute is given to plate juggling, and body bending.

The routine finished when they all got set for the climax, the trick in which the wives took part. One woman in each of the three rings, taking the cue from the center one, all worked in perfect unison. Removing their head-dresses, each woman stepped in the foreground joined by her husband; each couple sat down to a small table to which the chairs were attached at the base, facing each other and a tea service before them. Two ropes were lowered

from a crane-bar overhead as the assistant passed the hook attached to the rope, through the tightly braided and twisted knob of hair of each, while man and wife inter-locked their legs under the table.

At the signal of the equestrian director's whistle, all three couples

were hoisted in the air; joined by their legs they appeared to be sitting relaxed on the chairs, though actually being suspended by their hair, supporting the weight of the table as well. With the pulling of the scalp affecting the facial expression it took, on a look of fright, as if they had suddenly seen a ghost. Sitting there in the air, they poured and sipped their tea as though they enjoyed the party; thus holding the attention of the audience. Meanwhile four of their comrades were being hoisted up to at various points along the track to the ropes, stretched from the top of quarter poles at far ends of the big top, down toward the center and as the tea-party was lowered to the ground, down came these four flying Chinamen in a "slide for life," suspended by their queues; each one carrying the American flag in one hand, the Chinese flag in the other, thus assuring themselves of applause which I am sure they would have earned even *without presenting colors*. A spectacular number, theirs, always. Next . . . as the equestrian director's whistle was heard.

Mabel opened her trunk, unfastened and pulled down the split-tray from which she took out some clean "undies" and towel placing them on her chair and turning the tray up into the lid again; lifting another tray up which also catches against the top, she removed a kit containing her clothes-rack, this she assembled and set up at the end of her trunk, close to mine. I watched her as she went about this in a business-like way. I noticed when she opened the cover of the utility tray how neatly it was fixed, along the same line as the berths, here also, with a wide band of colored elastic tacked against the cover in proper spaces to hold articles like comb, scissors, whisk-broom,

nail-file, etc., essentials to have on the lot right at hand. Seeing her tear the wrapper from a cake of soap, all at once it dawned on me that I am not a visiting guest here, that I am with an outdoor show and promptly got busy in front of my own trunk.

"A water wagon must be around somewhere close by, chances are, the gang, won't bother filling the few buckets out there today." She said, "let's go find it."

"Oh do they have a 'commissary wagon here.'" I asked, more than anything, with a point to show off my former trouping experience, then continued "I forgot to pack soap for the lot, what I have is down at the cars."

"Why certainly" she replied "as if resenting my question."

"I mean—is it open today, this being Sunday and no show." I hurried to make amends for my stupidity.

"Oh my yes, it is open from the time it hits the lot you'll always find it in front of the cook house!" she said in words more voluble now, as we both made for the exit.

On our way out I noticed quite a number of women in the big dressing room by now,—each, with her own "set" or troupe—getting established in front of her trunks. Outside, we picked up our buckets. Mabel knew there was always a water wagon by the pad-room, we headed in that direction. She turned the wheel opening the flow while I held the pails under the stream. Close by was an open bale of straw for horses' bedding of which we each picked an armful for under our feet. It was a nice grass-covered lot, all, except our end, which must have been part of a trail that cut across, with hard bare ground. The straw would keep the dirt down in front of our trunks.

We met others coming along toward the water wagon—a regular bucket brigade. A woman or two at the dressing room entrance sending a message to her husband by the first man who happened to come along entering the mens' side; though only a canvas partition between, no one

ever calls the other across that wall. The men and their wives come out to the entrance after they have been summoned, and there they impart whatever their wish; at this time it was water, more than likely, the women wanted their husbands to get for them. The wives, customarily, do their husbands laundry, take charge of the up-keep of costumes, wash the tights for all the members of their troupe—so that in tinting them they will be of uniform color and shade; however, single men seemed to do a pretty good job on their own.

I followed the route over which Paul had led me earlier and found the commissary, a typical country dry-goods store on wheels, anything from a postage stamp up—the commissary had it. It can outfit the workmen from hat to shoes, of course, ladies' apparel is limited to rain coats and rubber boots with, perhaps, one or two grades of staple under wear and stockings if milady is caught short, but milord can always find his favorite shirts, collars, socks, even a pair of trousers in a pinch.

I got the soap and some route cards, they are the itinerary of the shows' movements; usually, four weeks of advance dates printed on them so the families and friends of the show people always know where to reach them from day to day. These cards are very informative; divided in five columns indicating everything of essential interest in connection

This statue act lithograph was used in 1916.

with each stand: date, town, state, railroad line and mileage to each succeeding stand. They cost five cents each and hardly anybody bothers copying them. They are bought and mailed to as many as one cares to correspond with, always keeping one tacked to the lid of one's trunk for reference. A route card is a source for a common slogan with a circus a satirical insinuation to one slow in grasping a situation, late in arriving for some event or not well informed, the person is told to "get a route card." Used in the wide margin of gags, it also serves as a guide for the show-folks, who hale from all points, looking forward with anticipation for each issue whereon they may see their home town scheduled, thrilling with thoughts of a reunion with their respective families and loved ones.

The first day they go on sale they form the topic for conversation all over the lots from the pad room to the in stake-and-chain wagon. The workmen are keenly interested in news and gossip concerning the show and these route cards; making their plans according to them—drop off at a certain spot that has been their original goal at the time they joined out, thus, solving the transportation problem. And for every one that dropped out, there were two to take the place left vacant.

Each town has its applicants; usually, young "punks" with romance and adventure as the incentive. They soon realized that neither was to be found with the circus, not romance, at any rate since there were no females to equal their class, by circus standards. Any gesture suggesting social leanings, even in the form of a friendly greeting between a performer or statue girl and a groom or a cook house "flunky," was frowned upon and cause for dismissal of one or both. However, there was adventure in the freedom for any youngster breaking away from his family and mingle with the adults, he became a

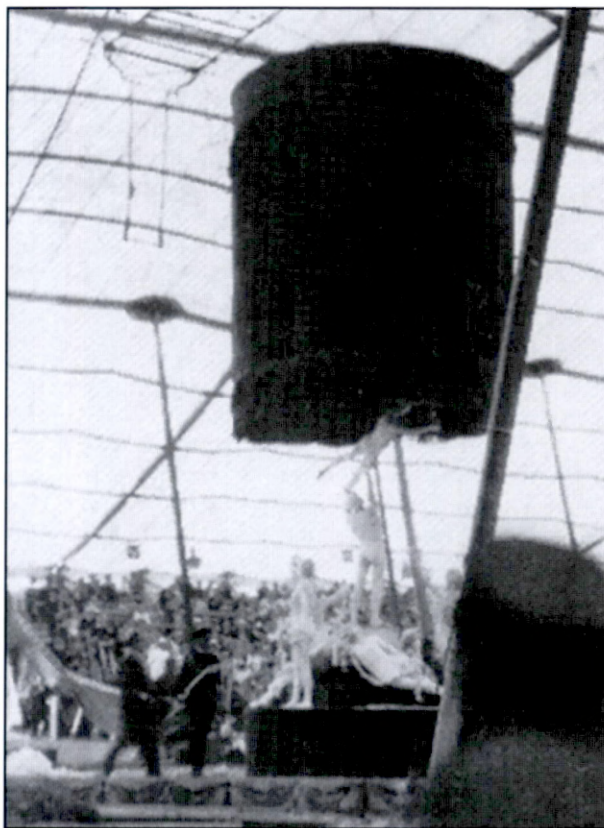


man over night.

Workmen in all departments were habitually named after the town or state of their origin, with which they became synonymous ever after. No one knew their given or family except the boss of their department and the cashier in the office—the red ticket wagon—where all the pay-envelopes were made up and contributed to them in their side of the cook house, every Wednesday. The only time called by their proper names; to all others they were simply known as “Boston,” “Kansas” etc.,. Sometimes were also named after their nationality or characteristics, like: “Frenchie,” “Dutch,” “Freckles,” “Mac-kie,” “Shorty,” “Limpy” (for one who was lame) and “Iodine” the nickname of one whose proper name was Ionie. Named also after famous men like George Washington, Abe Lincoln, Daniel Boone, (these were all roustabouts and property men sometime or other, with the big show because the may have borne some semblance to the original.)

It seems I am taking mighty long with that cake of soap in getting back to the dressing room to take that bath, but then anybody would hesitate to strip off and stand before that icy cold water freshly drawn from the wagon, and start washing from the face down, a genuine sponge bath, which leaves you as clean and refreshed as a daisy. After finishing the bath, one, usually, gathers up all the soiled “linens” and things to wash them right there and then in the same bucket, returning to the wagon for more water to rinse there; the clothes line, which every one has tucked in a compartment of the trunk is tended outside the side wall; the washing is hung up with clothespins, also the property of each individual with one’s initials penciled on (just in case they get confused with the neighbor’s whose line is stretched parallel within a few inches).

I soon was to learn that reason the partition between the main dressing room and this little corner for the statue girls use, was not so that we were rated as “untouchables,” but chiefly owing to the nature of our make-up, that messy white ointment



Large round curtains were lifted before each statue pose.

which required complete freedom of any covering while bathing, to get it off without smearing it here and there. This nude bathing was taboo in the big dressing room according to the rules of those ladies—the aristocrats—who dictated the “laws,” no self-respecting female would disrobe completely, without the shield of a kimono or bath-robe which was kept over her constantly during her bath. She would remove her outer garments and immediately get under the robe, which, hanging from her shoulders served as a private bath-house while removing her under garments, then fastening it under the arms she would proceed with her bath; starting with her face, neck and arms, washing and drying these parts, then raising the protective covering, fastening it at the neck, she would wash and dry the rest of her anatomy in all sections under the robe until she got down to her feet, which she would finish sitting down.

I have never found a satisfactory answer to this exaggerated modesty, which was enforced on all the others dressing in there, who would other-

wise not have gone to such extremes. I thought of the possibility of a sudden storm, a “blow-down,” catching them with their clothes off—no, that was too remote. It was just an old custom handed down from “grandma” and adhered to through the generations like other antiquated laws, in their social and moral codes, which just had to undergo a change—but soon.

Smoking among the fair sex had not yet become widely popular and the few that acquired the habit were certainly not with the circus. As I look back now, it seems unbelievable out of the large number of women with the show, the only one who had been addicted to smoking was Muzzie, the mother of Bird Millman—the greatest wire artiste of the time; for grace, charm and beauty,

perhaps of all time. Enjoying the privilege of traveling along with her famous daughter without taking part in the show herself, too much time on her hands may have accounted for her irrepressible desire for the cigarette, which was banned in the ladies’ dressing room, however Muzzie being tactful and like the good sport she was known to be, cultivated the friendship of the cowgirls, whom she’d visit in the “hooligan,” just so she could smoke. Here the women—while they themselves not given to smoking—were liberal minded on the subject and didn’t consider it vulgar for a woman to light up and puff away on a Fatima or whatever the favorite brand of each, back in 1916.

Gradually the performers arrived on the lot and everywhere one could see and hear small groups happily commenting on the nice warm sunshine concluding the conversation with: “Have you seen the mail man?” Acts with animals, taking a look at charges—if their pens were clean and well bedded, or the cages serviced usually, having their own private grooms or care-takers for dogs and other trained stock privately

owned. Aerial acts, looked in the big top to see how their apparatus appeared, set up under canvas hung by "falls," which their private riggers together with Mickey, the prop boss.

I proceeded to the cook house for lunch. The choice was beef stew or cold cuts; with time so limited before matinee, I decided on making a sandwich of the assortment of cold-cuts already on the table; this would eliminate waiting for service I figured. I could eat it at my leisure time in the dressing room, after the bath. Going through the "door" however, the checker stopped me: "What have we there?," he asked seeing the sandwich with paper napkin wrapped around it. "Why it's my lunch; I have no time to sit down I answered." "Sorry, you'll have to eat that here—against rules to take anything out" he said in a polite but firm manner, while blocking my way at the exit. "Well, I wasn't hungry in the first place." I thought as I left the sandwich on one of the tables nearby, knowing it would be wasted anyway.

The water, having been exposed to the sun all morning was of mild temperature, as I noticed on starting my bath. There were several others busily engaged in the same way, but I just confined my attention to my own little space. When Mabel came in, she introduced me to those present—only first names were used. Presently a very tall and stately woman came through the flap, almost touching me for lack of aisle space as she passed by. She was very fashionably dressed with a long cape over her smartly tailored suit and a neat toque over her classic hair-do.

Even before Mabel presented me as: "This is a new girl Tiny Kline." I removed her street clothes and put on a smock from her triangular corner she could look over the entire little "camp." Sizing me up, she asked Millie Hall how many she had in her group. Then turning to Margaret Mayes, discussing the grouping with her, making some changes in the positions, it was decided I go in Margaret's group in ring 3. "You show her the poses, Miss Rogers," she



The Barnum & Bailey side show in 1916. C. P. Fox collection.

said to one of the girls (whom Mabel introduced as Madeline) she always addressed everyone by her last name adding the prefix Miss or Mrs. as the case required. The switch affected Madeline—she was to show me her poses while she got instruction for new ones.

To describe these groups: the top figure on the pedestal was the principal of the theme of each subject; the group at the base comprising the atmosphere—a sort of detail. For example "America," the principal on top represented the Goddess of Liberty holding the torch, while the ones grouped around the three tiers at the base—each in a pose with "props" pertinent to the story—completed the "picture." I remember in this particular pose, I was stooped over a wheel, representing "Industry" while Madeline stood next to me with a blindfold over her eyes holding a spade in one hand and a balance in the other, which stood for "Justice" of course there were about seven "subs" at the base of each pedestal, each one a part of the subjects. Miss Claren, herself a famous model, imported from Leipzig or some other art center in Europe, posed in 2 (the center ring) while Millie Hall was "top" in ring 1. There were four changes of poses which took place inside that circular curtain resembling a shower-ring, king size, pulled up overhead during the exhibition of each pose and lowered again for changing, poses. Props were removed and changed for the ones to be used in the next "picture."

Since I was to go in without a rehearsal, all my positions were either sitting down or otherwise well supported—not being accustomed to standing on a narrow ledge—when the revolving table on which the whole structure was mounted started rotating, it was worse than a merry-go-round to hold one's balance; only then did I fully appreciate the dexterity of the "top" job especially that pose in the center ring, when Leo,

the understander in the Picchiani troupe of acrobats, stepped up on top with less than a two-foot square surface, holding Miss Claren over his shoulder—a towering height—the "subs" at the base depicting the story—some in a dance pose, expressing "Joy"—others down on knee with face buried in cupped hands for "grief" or "sorrow"; the title: "The Abduction." I could look over from ring 3 when the table, turning, was right for that angle—it was very exciting. I believe our subject during that pose was "Spring," because I sat quite comfortably with legs extended, holding a garland of flowers over my head.

Leo Picchiani, as he was known (though not one of the family; it was customary in the circus for the members to assume the name of the troupe they worked with) whom one might have called an Apollo, was the perfection of the masculine figure with the whitening all over him, clad only in what appeared to be a fig-leaf. (Statuary is always nude; it must be that true art is naked truth). He was the only masculine statue and took part in that one pose only. A few years later in the early twenties when Broadway went in for nudism this same Leo having left the Picchianis was doing well as a male "strip" with one of the top shows on the Great White Way.

The bugle-call was heard in the most remote corner of the dressing rooms, announcing the half-hour before the show. Another rush on the wardrobe department for the spec costumes. The theme of the 1916 spec was 'Persia, The Thousand and One Nights.' Whatever the pantomime, I



The cover of the 1916 Barnum & Bailey program.

missed it; the costume I was issued marked me as one of the numerous slave-girls, yet it was very richly adorned with spangles over the heavy satin and velvet material; a wig with two long black braids of hair and red sandals completed the outfit. I noticed Madeline Rogers, the girl who prompted me on the statue poses, didn't wear the wig; her natural hair was exactly as long and as black; she was small otherwise, about my size and like the majority of the girls, she was from the ballet of previous years. After the second bugle, which is still fifteen minutes before the show starts, the people in the dressing rooms got on their way, some, the ones who were mounted—leaving for the pad-room, the others would just go outside; the only chance men and women can visit and carry on a flirtation without being conspicuous about it. There they stand, by the back-door, crowded tightly against each other; no one knows who's interested in whom, except the two—any two in that crowd, for that matter; next show, they pick a little different spot to

stand so their fellow performers won't get "ideas" about them, while the others are in the same boat. Those minutes of waited outside the back-door have been the start of many a romance and broken hearts. The swain mounted on his horse with the regalia of a prince, a slave-girl standing right close petting his horse or playing with the gear—anything, to demonstrate her affection, which of course is understood by the other party, since this is as close as they can ever get.

But, to resume

the procession of "Persia."

An abbreviated version of it: "The King" entered with the pompous ceremony behooving his wealth and high station, reclining on what appeared to resemble a "chaise lounge," carried on shoulders of slaves.

Evidently, having a pre-arranged "date" to meet the queen on one of the stages near the center ring; the king arrived first and was settled on the carpet-covered platform with his statesmen and guards surrounding him so that only the grandstand spectators had a vantage point to view this ceremonious spectacle. Having arrived, the queen like-wise, was carried from her in throne in some sort of stretcher-like conveyance and deposited on the opposite stage by the center ring, also covered with rugs and tiger-skins, as well as having a few live tigers about, which were held on leashes by attendants. The latter exhibition probably with intent to show off the

queen's courage. She, too, having a large personnel about her, shutting off the view from all but the grandstand side.

Some silent acting on the stages accentuated by music and gestures, pages chasing to-and-fro across the ring between the stages, relaying what was on the mind of each—the King and Queen—all this part I never did get a good view by looking through a small opening in the curtain, while still waiting outside with other slave-girls and subjects. I don't, to this day, know to which party I belonged and served. When we heard the band swing into the intermezzo, or whatever the spec music was classified as, a monotonous dirge to which some of the men added their own lyrics: "Oh My!-the kidney-stew is hard," which seemed to fit in with the repetitious strain, which they sang all over the lot that was our cue to line up, four abreast, and fall in the marching procession all around the arena, following horses, elephants and whatnot leaving a pretty rough road on muddy lots for us to follow, where the wheels of vehicles left deep furrows and holes we could not see for the straw the men had put

An 1916 eight sheet Persia lithograph.





Ella and Fred Bradna on Barnum & Bailey in 1916.

there to cover the mire, simulating sawdust.

Turning in the spec costume, with my name plainly marked on all made up for me. "A size one in tights should fit you," she said as she handed it to me. Checking on its contents, I found a set of white cotton tights, the upper part resembling a man's undershirt with tape sewed on at the hemline in front and back to be tied at the groin to keep it from hiking up—a rather crude arrangement, but we all wore hip-sashes which covered up the joining line of the two pieces. A course white haired wig with a permanent hair-do: *ala Psyche*, which fitted any size head. Over this a wide tape tied tightly around the head, scoured it from sliding out of place at the same time lending it a Grecian effect. A long, flowing white-satine cape, to be worn over the tights to keep the form covered during the trip from the dressing room until getting inside that curtain referred to as the balloon, ready to mount the revolving table; these comprised the statue accessories.

The large group, as we walked through the lot into the big top, presented an eerie sight like a flock of specters or Halloween masqueraders.

Romances on the show were tabooed, no man and maid would dare sit side by side in the big top

between shows, or anywhere on the lot for that matter. Sometimes they would try to pull the wool over the eyes of others by going in to practice a new trick. But that's soon discouraged when suspicions are aroused. As to maneuvering a date to meet in town, measures against that, too, had been taken to prevent such a "rendezvous," everybody knew George Black, the "Edgar Hoover" of the circus, but no one knew who were his confederates—working as private detectives for him, whose business it was to track down any crooks or imposters who might try to infringe on the integrity of the show and also to watch out for the Romeos and Juliettes who might wish to evade the restriction imposed, by posing as John Smith, downtown.

Equestrian Director Par-Excellence

When I saw the others leaving the dressing room I followed suit; this being my first day. I had to be shown my place in the procession of the

Fred Bradna as the Barnum parade marshal.



spec. The band finished the overture and filed through the curtain to a small tent near the entrance—the band top—where they changed into some oriental robes and fezes in less than three minutes' time and were back by the door.

Then, with great pomp and ceremony Fred Bradna—in full dress-suit, high silk hat, black patent-leather shoes and immaculate white gloves—appeared at the "door," everybody's attention on him—the picture of a foreign diplomat—class, dignity plus; around his neck a fine, black cord, holding not a monocle but a whistle. It is the instrument that controls the entire performance. That whistle which packs a greater wallop than the loudest cracking whip—emphasizing the strong points of an act or halting whatever is going on. Once that whistle is blown the act is over, whether the performers succeeded in doing all their tricks or still have some left up their sleeve, the ring is no longer theirs. It stops the music when concentration of attention to a feature is requested. Perhaps few people have taken into consideration the importance attached to that shiny little whistle of this fabulous Fred Bradna, who for half a century has graced the arena of the Greatest Show on Earth. He was the spirit of the show; the circus as I have known it, when it was at its pinnacle. But, like all great powers that reach their height then have to decline, so have certain branches in the amusement fields—and yes, the circus.

Reminiscence of those days when about to reach the peak—when the "Who's Who" of circusdom assembled under one big top; the big top—with eight center poles instead of four—the era referred to when discussing circus history, tending to awaken nostalgia deep in my heart, wishing I might turn time, as I would a clock backwards. For, never before nor after, was there another artist to equal or even approach the talent, personality and achievement of those stars who made that history—who are the synonym of "circus" and will stand out as examples through the ages.

Providence has favored me that I should have lived during that epoch. To have been the contempo-

rary of such notable personalities as those I shall mention in the following chapters; not only performers but personnel as well. Those who have departed and shall never be replaced. Yes I consider myself fortunate, having had the privilege to have known them and having personal contact with them as I look back to the circus, yesterday.

Bradna blew the whistle, a shrill, penetrating sound, yet easy on the nerves. The door-man pulled the cord opening the curtain—the back-door—and the trumpeters on horseback, at the head of the band, sounded off with a fanfare heralding the procession; the band struck up the *Triumphal March*, specially written music for the production. Following the the trumpeters through the door, along the hippodrome track and the show was on.

The band was followed by "Sheiks" on gorgeously bedecked horses, with plumes and streamers setting off the trappings.

"Ohs" and "Ahs" could be heard from excited spectators as they saw one eye-opening wonder after another. The array of coloring so and glitter was so dazzling it made one's heart want to jump out.

The jewelled tusks and shiny ornament-covered blanket of the elephants, carrying beautiful girls with gigantic fans, on their heads, or seated in houdahs strapped to the elephants' backs. Twenty-four Shetland ponies drawing the Oriental facsimile of a Cinderella coach of the *enfant noble* in the procession, followed by some more oddly dressed characters an camels, still another mounted section, wearing hoods and masks, beating kettledrums rigged to the flanks of their mounts, giving out with weird sounds. There were so many wonderful things that it exhausts my adjectives to describe them all. So I shall ship part of the cortege and pick up a float with a golden throne whereon sat the royal queen attended by her glamorous maids, fanning her constantly.

Mrs. Silbon, of the Siegrist-Silbon troupe, a flying act, of brunette type jet-black hair, made a regal queen.

There was something about this woman that commanded the respect of every one; not so young and, try as I would, I failed to put a finger on



Mrs. Jennie Silbon in spec wardrobe.

what made her so attractive. No, she wasn't beautiful of face, but strong of character and majestic in carriage plus a most beautifully formed body.

From a social viewpoint, she was snobbish to extremes. Interesting—for study to what height she carried this trait. A sample of it is shown in the order, in which she had the trunks of the girl members of the troupe arranged. Her trunk was the first to the right in the first aisle. Next to hers she had Marian's (one of the two Bordner sisters working in the act and now known as "Silbon") who she was very fond of, then followed the trunk of her niece, Emily, with Helen Bordner in succession; Clara's, then Bella's last. Clara, a happy-go-lucky natured girl, though having been with the troupe longer than the Bordner girls, was next to last because of her care-free disposition which was erroneously taken for lack of dignity, beside the rumors rampant that she and Alfredo, one of the Codona brothers, also members of the Siegrist-Silbon troupe, at the time, were that way about each other, which didn't please that mistress of pride and propriety, not one whit. However, Clara was still preferred to Bella, whose former connection with the ballet had not yet been lived down. Bella was blonde and beautiful, on the Mae West type, and popular with the boys, shocking so, hence the reason for being placed furthest, the last in line of her troupe.

Miss Claren was in charge of the white make-up, which she prepared and distributed to us. This paste, applied generously over the face and neck, then dusted with talcum powder so it will not crack (precipitate) with the heat, seemed to benefit rather than harm the skin. The long sleeves gloves taking care of the arms and hands. The ingredients were zinc oxide with two parts of glycerin to one of water, to make it the subsistence of cold cream. When the weather was cold and damp she substituted alcohol for the water. The clowns used lard to mix with their zinc, which made theirs waterproof and durable, since they use the same make-up through the entire performance. They had to use Albolene (mineral oil) to remove it, while ours could be washed off with soap and water.

An indispensable item with the circus performer is the "slop shoe," a heavy, wooden platform-sole with a leather vamp or a wide strap nailed onto, to wear from dressing room to ring, as a sort of overshoe. They were sold by one of the male performers, who specialized in making them in any size desired. They could also be bought in any store supplying cooks and bakers by an odd coincidence. They later became a fad with the general public, as "beach-shoes" and worn as sandals.

For a nice dry lot, the elite class of the ladies bought satin evening slippers with rhinestone-trimmed heels, cutting away the back part to facilitate stepping in and out of without having to stoop over, using them as slop shoes. They looked daintier and otherwise added class to the wearer, while going in and out of the arena where the public in the reserved seats can see them before and after the act.

Could these, by any chance, have suggested the idea for the "mules," a fashion for bed-room use that developed in the 1920s. Mules so called because they could be kicked off the feet, which was the way those temperamental stars would treat them on their way up to the trapeze or mounting the bareback of the horse. They had to be retrieved by their assistant to step into after taking the bow on finishing the act.

Frank A. Robbins

a most successful failure

PART SEVEN

By Robert Sabia

1892--1904--the interim years advice to the lovelorn

Dear Abby, I write to you because I am in a dilemma. I am thirty something years of age, married with three children, two of who are boys. My wife of some fifteen years is a good person and an excellent mother. Unfortunately, my career takes me away from home much of the year. I have experienced great stress in my chosen profession as a circus owner. For the past few years I have been dogged by crisis after crisis. It certainly hasn't been easy but shall never give up my quest to become a successful member of the first rank of circus owners.

Over the years I have repeatedly requested my wife to travel with me but she has steadfastly refused. Her position is understandable with three rambunctious youngsters to raise. On the other hand, she knew what business I was in when we got married, and the job requirements have only intensified over the years. She has absolutely no interest in the circus business and what I do. Except for the children, we have nothing in common.

A few years back, a vivacious young lady joined my show. She has been with it ever since. She comes from a circus background. After a while, I took note of her. One thing led to another and before I knew it, we were in love. Besides being from a prominent circus family and being talented in her own right, she is very interested in the business in general, and my success at it in specific. She helps me in so many ways. In fact, she is all things that I have ever

wanted in a wife. I fear that if I don't act promptly and propose, I shall lose her forever and with it, the essence of my being. What's a decent person to do? Please advise soonest.

Divorce in the 1890's was an anathema in our culture. While show business folks were in and out of marriages far more frequently than any other work grouping, divorce laws across the nation were strictly enforced and the process was both time-consuming and exhausting. As most know, divorce is governed by the domicile state. Most probably, Frank A. Robbins was domiciled in Westchester County, New York. All of this is important because in an action for default in alimony payments (1909) which will be addressed in detail later at the appropriate time, it was stipulated that a divorce between Robbins and his wife, Fanny was granted in New York in

Frank A. Robbins around 1893. Pfening Archives.



1894. No mention was ever made of bigamy. Yet we know that the first born of Frank A. and Matilda (Mattie) Robbins nee Bliss, took place in late 1892 or early 1893. It was a daughter named Winona, commonly known as Winnie who would greatly contribute to Robbins' circuses of the 1900's. As such, it appears that another divorce was granted around 1892 in another jurisdiction. This state may have been North Carolina as Robbins spent some time there after his tragic tour of 1891. He could have established residency there or a similar state long enough to satisfy the legal time requirements which generally was around one year. The fact that another state (New York) granted a divorce later was not unusual because at that time, some states refused to recognize the legitimacy of a divorce in another jurisdiction. This is in marked contrast to the willingness of all the states to do so now. The New York action was most likely brought by Mrs. Fanny Robbins in acknowledgment of a defacto situation and to secure some alimony to aid her in bringing up the children. It will be recalled that Fanny was a teacher and thereby had the means of providing for herself.

Mattie Bliss came from a circus background. Her father was Charles Bliss, the human fly, said by some to have created ceiling walking (although Richard Sands is generally credited for this spectacular innovation). There were at least eight children in the family including a brother George who was a member of the Robbins circus on a number of tours. Some of the other children were also

notable circus performers. The family home was in Madison, Wisconsin. Mattie was born in 1870 or 1871 in Detroit. It may be recalled that we first saw her name on the 1886 Robbins show as a Serio-Comic in the side show. In subsequent years she performed as a vocalist in the concert. As we shall see, as Robbins assumed executive positions with various circuses, Mattie was by his side as manager of privileges, front door superintendent, ticket seller and a variety of other assignments. She became as much a part of the Robbins' career path as Frank A. himself. They formed a very viable team.

Also out of this union came Milton Robbins, who many today remember well. Milton served in many capacities in the circus. He is probably best known as a side show manager. He was born on October 15, 1894 in Bridgeport, Connecticut several months early, weighing only three and a half pounds at birth. Mother Mattie must have taken some time off from her position as head of refreshments on the Hunting's Circus in order to give birth. Bad timing on the part of Milton because as planned, he was to be born during the off-season.

So we have a situation that might have been awkward in the small world of the circus. Sons Charles and Frank, Jr. from the first marriage, and wife Mattie, daughter Winnie and son Milton from second marriage, all living and working on the same circus, viz.: Robbins circuses 1905-1908. But it apparently worked well enough. The severing of relationships with Charles and Frank, Jr. came as a result of the alleged failure of Frank, Sr., to live up to meaningful ownership promises made to his two oldest sons. But that's getting ahead of our story.

1892-1893--two if by sea

According to several articles in the *Clipper* during the first quarter of 1892, Mr. Robbins apparently was operating a boat circus in North

Newspaper ad for the New York Circus in 1893. Author's collection.

Carolina. It was suggested that this was a successful endeavor. He may have continued in this venue throughout the year. However, as usual, he had bigger plans and they encompassed the season of 1893.

In the *Clipper* of February 18, 1893, The New York Circus, Wood's Museum, and the Central Park Menagerie made it known to the world that it was back by popular demand and was looking for all sorts of folks to flesh out its organization. Among positions needed included a general agent, contracting agent, boss hostler, boss canvasman, master of transportation and a chandelier man. Robbins was also in need of performers, with Charles Fish specifically identified. It is important to note that he could be contacted in New Bern, North Carolina lending credence to the notion that he may have changed his domicile to that location or at least that state. It is not clear if the show was to be a rail-er or wagon show, but the season was to open at Norfolk in April.

Something must have changed in

March because the Norfolk operation was never mentioned again. In lieu thereof, a difference concept and venue was introduced. Robbins returned to New York and visited the *Clipper's* offices in early April. He advised that shortly he was announcing the details of his plans for the forthcoming year. He kept this commitment to disclose the show's particulars and did so in the next week's issue of the *Clipper*. The article stated in part that "... Mr. Robbins ... has been bustling about with his usual energy, greeting all of his old friends and receiving the warmest sort of encouragement. Mr. Robbins has completed the details of a compact show, which will open April 29, at Bergen Point (Bayonne), New Jersey, going thence by steamer up the Hudson, and remaining on the water until about June 15, when wagons will be taken and the interior New York towns will be played. Mr. Robbins has engaged the steamer *Lenora* (sic), which will be overhauled and refitted especially for the accommodations of the show. This, by the way, will be the first circus to do the Hudson River towns by boat since John H. Murray's days. A menagerie of eight to ten cages, an extensive side show and other features will be carried. When the show leaves the boat about twenty wagons will be used. The canvas will be: main tent, 120 foot round top; menagerie, 60x120 feet; side show, 30x60 feet. H. H. Sylvester will be the treasurer, and Geo. A. Hill, the assistant manager. They have long been associated with Mr. Robbins. W. B. Johnson's band has been engaged." Lots of familiar faces. Loyalists to the end.

What is with this "circus by steamer?" River circuses were not new. In fact, prior to the outreach of the rail system, waterways were the most efficient means of transit and circuses were in the forefront of entertainment at river towns. As the mighty Hudson was one of the first rivers to be paralleled by railroads both on the east and west sides, river circuses appeared to be a thing of the past on

this most important waterway.

However, the Hudson was spotted by numerous prosperous river towns; perhaps not river towns as known on the Ohio, Mississippi, or Missouri, but more like towns on the river. Most of these towns had been played by the various Robbins circuses over the years. He knew that they were good circus towns and represented a golden opportunity to be successfully scheduled. The planned wagon tour in New York State probably included many towns and villages that he also had frequently visited in the past. All in all, a sound plan as viewed a hundred years later. Known territory, known potential customers, and a unique format for this particular period (a circus traveling by boat). Almost a sure fire winner. Almost.

Marine expert John Polacsek has provided us with the following pertinent information on the "Screw Steamer *Lenoir*." It was approximately 104 feet long and 27 feet wide. It drew almost 6 feet of water. It was a relatively new vessel, having been built in Baltimore in 1887. It weighed about 130 tons and was home ported at Bridgeport, Connecticut. All things considered, a fairly impressive vessel. Although the exact route is known in detail, enough is available. Coupled with the knowledge of the river towns on the Hudson, reasonably conjecture that the ship probably didn't travel much more than 10 miles a night. What it did do for sure was to go from the west bank and back again as the circus dates and towns availed themselves. Except for the single railroad bridge at Poughkeepsie, the entire 130 mile length of the Hudson, from the Narrows (Staten Island/Brooklyn) to Albany was unfettered. So the ability to cross back and forth at will was certainly an advantage in routing the show.

As the season's opener drew closer, Robbins was still looking for additional performers. It seems that he didn't follow through on some of the inquiries that were sent to New Bern, North Carolina, as he request-

ed that those individuals write to him in New York. Interestingly, musicians were requested to write to R. N. Davenport in Bridgeport. It is not known if Davenport had replaced the previously identified W. B. Johnson or was merely acting as a mail drop.

The April 29 *Clipper* provided additional information on the outfit, some of which is suspect, given the circumstances that were quickly evidenced. The article related that "everything at Bergen Point, New



Jersey where the Frank A. Robbins show is 'getting together' wears a lively aspect. The canvas goes up April 26, and practice begins on that date. The band chariot and the last of the cages are just from the paint shops, and look fine. The show opens at Bergen Point April 29."

Nice try but the circus did not open as scheduled for the amazing reason that the performers never showed up. At least not enough of them to give a performance. Neither Bayonne newspapers had any ads for the show but both mentioned it. The *Bayonne Times* indicated that Harry Leonard, a former resident, was with it, but did not identify his position. After the non-start at Bergen Point, the show then allegedly played Port Richmond (5/1), Stapleton (5/2), and Tottenville (5/3), all on Staten Island.

It should be noted that although the circus traveled by steamer, it may be that wagons were loaded intact on board. One gets that impression if the press release regarding cages and the band chariot is accurate. Because it was planned that upon completion of the boat tour the outfit would continue as an overland wagon enterprise, it may be that the baggage wagons were also loaded on

board. On the other hand, baggage could have been handled using a gilly set up. Because the towns scheduled were in the main small, lots were probably available short distances from the dock areas and a gilly operation may have been most effective. The only meaningful details on the show were set forth in the *Clipper* of May 20. "The New York Circus, F. A. Robbins manager, is sailing up the Hudson River, in a chartered steamer, showing at the different cities and towns as they journey, and having a

good time generally, for which special purpose the members have organized the Lenora Club, named after the steamer, with the following officers, and members; President, William Avery; Vice President, G. Bliss (brother of wife Mattie Robbins); treasurer, William Vandee; secretary, Charley Williams; Dave Lassard, Joe A. Robie, D. F. Gallaher, John McNamara, Deine Fritz, W. C. Murray, H. A. Dornity, John Callahan, John Foster, Gagnier, Dave Kinsey. The latter is the chief engineer of the craft of which C. W. Humphrey is captain. They have a band of twelve pieces, a new 110 foot round top, with a 50 foot middle piece, all brand new, and the show carries ninety-six people, for who the ever welcome ghost always walks on time. The company comprises of the Averys, Will and Lizzie, aerial artists, Lassard and Albion, gymnasts, tumblers and general performers; Wilt Manning, bar and rings; George Bliss, somersault artist and high leaper; Robie, tight wire, Kebeler and Dougherty, comeques, and Col. John Foster, the old time clown and jester, who entertains the audience for a solid thirty minutes, with his funnyisms, songs, etc., assisted by George A. Hill, as ringmaster. Mr. Robbins is determined to make this show a success, and everyone knows that he is a hustler from the heels up. They make thirty stands on the river by boat and take to the wagons. Business is good and prospects never looked brighter."

Hmmmm. Maybe so when this article was penned but something happened in the next few days that extinguished the bright light.

The same issue of the *Clipper* mentioned that each performer had his/her own stateroom on a good boat. It also advised that the entire company visited Sing Sing prison on May 11, presumably when the circus played there. The only ad that has been unearthed to date was for the next day at Peekskill. It claimed a grand street parade. Curiously, there is no mention of it being a boat circus. Unfortunately there was no after notice.

At Marlborough (5/13), each boy that attended the circus was given a Chinese rattle. For several days thereafter businessmen about town were suffering the annoyance of the busy boy's rattling devices.

Things were so good with the fledgling show. At Wappinger Falls (5/16), the local paper noted that "(t)he circus which showed here Tuesday did not take in enough money to meet their obligations and were attached. They settled the case Wednesday afternoon by paying portion of the claim." In all likelihood this meant that the circus was also prevented from proceeding to its next date thereby blowing the Wednesday stand as well. The day previous, at Matthawan (5/15), a local woman patron and her small girl were struck by a falling pole. The lady was seriously injured but fortunately the little girl less so.

The local Catskill paper carried the following snippet on May 18. "It is rumored that a circus of some sort will be in town today. When and where does not appear. It is probably stuck in the mud somewhere along the road." So much for the sorry state of the advance on the show. Interestingly, the paper's attempt at jest relative to being



The dining and privilege car Winona on the Hunting show. Pfening Archives.

stuck in the mud was exactly what happened, although not along the road. The next day it reported "that the Grand Circus advertised to appear yesterday did not show up. It is reported that the grand aggregation traveled on a small boat and the boat ran ashore near Tivoli (a few miles downstream and across the river), sticking the boat fast in the mud and it could not get off."

So the great seafaring adventure ended on a mud flat in the Hudson.

A page from the 1895 Hunting route book listing Robbins. Pfening Archives.

HUNTING'S
New Enormous Railroad Shows.
SEASON OF 1895.

General Offices and Winter Quarters, New Castle, Pa.

EXECUTIVE STAFF.

Robt. J. Hunting,	- - - Sole Owner
Frank A. Robbins,	- - - General Superintendent
Chas. E. Griffin,	- - - Manager of Museum
Mrs. Clarisse Hunting,	- - - General Accountant
Edward Manley Goff,	- - - Treasurer
Dr. O. M. Crosby,	- - - License and Claim Adjuster
H. H. Whittier,	- - - Press Agent and Secretary
Harry Allen,	- - - Special Agent
George E. Bartlett,	- - - Detective
Wm. Conklin,	- - - Forage Agent
John Beck,	- - - Solicitor
Frank S. Griffin,	- - - Route Book Reporter

ADVANCE.

W. H. Evans,	- - - General Agent
J. N. Wisner,	- - - Railroad Contractor

The to-be overland show never got off the mud so to speak. The path back for Frank A. Robbins met an obstacle he could not overcome--a combination of nature and low tide.

Ever undaunted, in the July 15 *Clipper* Robbins advertised for side show personnel who should be anticipating a long season. He was back in New York City. But the side show initiative wasn't to be. In the *Clipper* of October 21, the reader was advised that "Frank A. Robbins has been with us (Hunting Circus) since August 28 and we wonder sometimes



The Bob Hunting bandwagon ready for parade. Pfening Archives.

before. He is as energetic as ever and he says that he will yet have another big show of his own." He would do just that but not for a while.

1893-1895--replenishing the money tree

Frank A. Robbins was clearly broke. His various attempts to make money as an owner failed at the box office. However this did not mean that his great experiences as a owner/manager had no value in the market place. His reputation as a driven and smart manager was known throughout the circus industry. He had many friends in high places and all he needed to do was to find the right fit for himself and his soon to be growing family. The small railer, Hunting's Circus, appeared to be just the fit he required. Not only was he welcome to continue in the position that he gained in the middle

of 1893 but there was an excellent opportunity for Mattie to provide good and remunerative services as well. So it was that the Robbins family remained on the Hunting's Circus for the remainder of 1893, and the entire seasons of 1894 and 1895. His position was general superintendent-treasurer. By all accounts, he ran the show and the owner, Robert Hunting, focused on the performance. Much of the routes were visiting the same territories that Robbins did as an owner of his own show. Mattie was also on board as the manager of refreshments; that is when she wasn't having a baby. For the 1894 and 1895 seasons, the following contract between Messrs. Robbins and Hunting was in effect. Frank A. was to be paid \$18 per week during the anticipated 30 week season. In addition, he was to receive one half of the profits of the lunch car which car was to be furnished by him but transported by Mr. Hunting free of charge. Robbins and his family were to have a stateroom in the lunch car and provided board, also free of charge. It is suspected that this lunch car plus Mattie's role as manager of refreshments contributed a fair sum to the family coffers.

The 1895 Hunting route book contains a picture of the lunch car "Winona," which was obviously named for their daughter. In fact, the 1894 route book has a picture of "Winsome Winnie Robbins Every-body's Favorite." It is apparent that the Robbins' family had placed its impress upon the Hunting's Circus. Hunting remained a small railer throughout this period and seemed to operate successfully. It failed the year after Robbins left. Was there any connection here? Who knows.

Despite these seemingly happy times with Hunting, Robbins was there primarily to replenish his war chest and he made no secret of the fact that he was eagerly awaiting the time when he would return to

an ownership role. It seems that he accomplished this financial goal by the end of 1895 thereby providing the financial wherewithal for his next venture which took place in 1896.

However, there was a dark side to all of this. In a letter dated January 21, 1896, Charles Hazard, the President of the Greater New York Advertising Company, wrote to his good friend Robbins. It seems that both gentlemen were in an alcohol rehabilitation center together and got to know each other's ambitions and shortcomings well. The letter says in pertinent part "(w)as delighted to get your letter today. Was wondering only the other day how 'Barnum' was getting along. Glad to know you are all right and doing well. You certainly deserve the biggest kind of success and I truly hope you well be a millionaire long before you turn up your toes. So far as myself I am in splendid shape--feel like a kitten--don't think of a drink and wouldn't take another

A newspaper ad for the 1896 Van Amburgh show. Author's collection.

for the world. I know friend Robbins that you feel the same way and mean to live sober and die sober. There is nothing in the old stuff as you and I both know." He goes on to relate the recent information on mutual friends who apparently were also in the rehab center at the same time. Mr. Hazard closes with kind thoughts to Mrs. Robbins. Obviously, Frank A. Robbins had a serious and recurring drinking problem which may have affected his judgment as an owner.

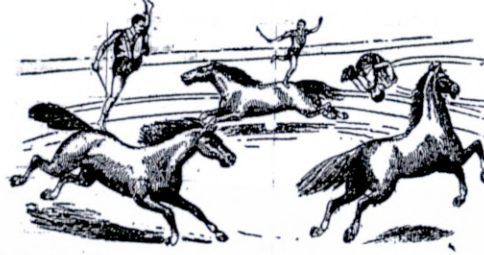
This problem would manifest itself again from time to time. It may have had a part in his unseemly death in 1920. However for the short term, issues regarding drinking may have been successfully addressed and besides, it was the time for more action. And action was what Robbins was all about.

1896--smaller is better--or is it just smaller?

Overland circuses, large railers, smaller railers, boat circuses--what's left. How about a gilly circus? Sounds right. Limited capital investment. Known territory. A famous title. A highly experienced staff. Once again, all the ingredients of a winner. Let's do it.

A familiar start. In a February issue of the *Clipper* a typical Frank A. Robbins ad appeared: "20 Bill Posters Wanted. Also 2 car managers, 2 route riders. Write General Agent Great Van Amburgh Shows, Care Great American Printing Co. 57 Beckman Street, New York." Unless something earlier was missed, this is the first written declaration that the Great Van Amburgh Circus was back in business. No mention of who was in charge. Nothing is known regarding the arrangements on accessing this famous title although is reasonable to assume that Robbins leased its use on a monthly or seasonal basis. In addition, the former mail drop with Samuel Booth's Show

COMING!
The Great Van Amburgh Show
 On their 15th Annual Tour of the United States,
Will Exhibit at Dunellen,
On WEDNESDAY, JULY 15th. 1896
 Come and See the Many Fascinating Sights in the Mammoth Arena
 and Water-Proof Tents.



See the Dauntless Riders,
 See the Fearless Acrobats,
 See the Trained Monkeys,
 See the Performing Horses,
 See the Educated Canines,
 See the Intrepid Equestrians,
 See the Free Street Parade,
 See the Marvelous Contortionists,
 See the Wondrous Trapezists,
 See the World Famed Artists,
 See the Funny Clowns,
 See the Great Museum,
 See the Original Jugglers,
 See the Wonderful Leapers!

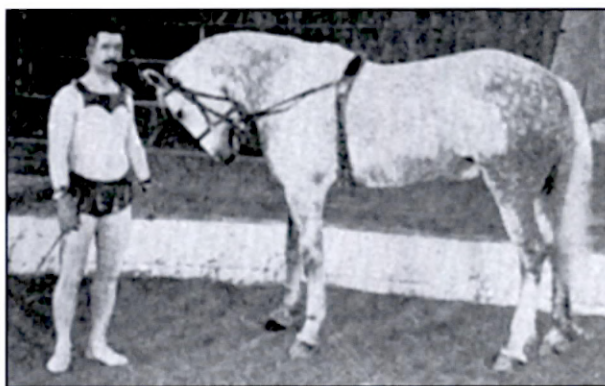
And See the Thrilling Bicycle Ride on a Single Wire Thirty Feet from the Ground--ridden by a lady.

And above all do not confound us with the many fly by night attractions, so-called great shows, who come to-day and you never hear of them again. THE VANAMBURGH SHOW was attended by your fathers and grandfathers. It has been continually before the public since 1891, and Succeeds by Deserved Success. Will positively exhibit at

DUNELLEN, JULY 15th, RAIN OR SHINE.

Printers on Centre Street was no longer used. The drop was now the Great American Printing Co. It may be that "Show Printers" was no longer in business or that Messrs. Robbins and Booth no longer had a productive relationship, or some other good and valid reason. The fact remains that we have a new drop. If he was dealing with a new printer, many of his old staffers were back including O. J. Ferguson, manager of advance; his sometimes partner and angel, George A. Hill, general superintendent; Dave Costello, equestrian director; and Dr. Lynn, refreshment caterer. Mattie, with two youngsters on hand, was not listed in any roster found and probably remained resident in northern New Jersey, doing motherly chores. New names included Charles A. Parslow, treasurer; Jake Posey, master of stock, Charles W. Rote, leader of the band; and Fred Hamilton, boss canvasman. Messrs. Costello and Posey held similar positions with the 1895 Hunting's Circus and were well known to Robbins. There is a serious question whether Jake Posey ever joined the show. His autobiography doesn't mention it. Perhaps a flat car circus was originally planned which later evolved into a gilly operation thereby obviating the need for a boss hostler of Mr. Posey's capabilities.

In any event, the Great Van Amburgh Show opened its season in Jersey City on April 29 and 30, supposedly to fine business. The *Clipper* of May 9 advised that in addition to Dave Costello, were his wife Ada, who was a principal bareback and menage rider, the Forepaugh family probably William "Bib" and his wife Josephine, gymnasts and acrobats; Frank Mann and wife, the clown John Foster, Dick Sands, a clog dancer; the Samwell family, the Willetts, Amy Pickard, the Evans, Charles H. Higgins and Harry Loughlin. If all of these folks were actually on the circus it had an impressive lineup indeed. In addition, Gus Fairbanks was identified as



Dave Castello, equestrian director of the Van Amburgh show. Pfening Archives.

assistant manager with Robbins listed as the manager.

There is no record of the show's whereabouts until May 9 when Englewood, New Jersey was played. As most the newspapers of Northeast New Jersey are available and were researched to no avail, it is conjectured that the circus was an organizational mode during the first week of May and its initial traveling date was in fact Englewood. The newspaper ad for that locale depicted "Eclipse, the Trapeze Horse" trained and exhibited by Adam Forepaugh. No other mention was ever made of this very special act. As far as known to this writer, Adam Forepaugh, Jr. had already retired because of ill health. The following Monday (5/11) the outfit played Nyack, New Jersey. The newspaper ad depicted the Eugene Bros. (aerialists). No record of this act being on the show has been uncovered. Nevertheless, the performance garnered excellent reviews by the local press which stated that "every performer was good and received well-deserved applause from the large audience present. The bareback riding was first-class, a woman's bicycle riding on the slack wire was a remarkable feat; in fact, there was not a poor gesture in the entire show." This was a wonderful start. A 10 cent and 25 cent admission charge was implemented. Spring Valley (5/12), Suffern (5/13) and Monroe (5/14) all reported an excellent show. At Suffern, school was closed in the afternoon so the

children could attend the circus. Business and reviews continued to be favorable at Goshen (5/15). The local paper commented "while not making the extravagant pretensions which characterize some institutions of this kind, this company's show was satisfactory in all respects, many of the features being of exceptional merit. The orchestra was

without exception the worst which ever evolved discords in Goshen." So what's perfect. A few sour notes between friends should go without derisive comment. Besides, the show was not only presenting its very skilled musicians during the performance, the same ensemble did its thing in the morning downtown in lieu of a street parade. Double your pleasure. A sad note in Goshen: a valuable horse died there which had only been with the troupe a few days. In addition, a dog was missing during the transit from Spring Valley to Suffern. A large reward was offered for its recovery. It should be noted that during this period no mention was made on how the show traveled from town to town. Given the distances between the show towns during this period, an overland means of transportation could easily have been used.

However the next reported stand was the large city of Passaic, New Jersey, clearly too far for an overland move. There is no local newspaper record of this date actually being scheduled or played. Leon W. Washburn played Passaic on May 7.

In the May 16 *Clipper* it was claimed that business was very good. A then current roster was "listed as follows: David Castello (sic), principal equestrian; Mlle. Ada principal and manage; Mons. Joseph La Tour, equestrian and general performer; Ada Candor, equestrienne and ceiling walker; the Forepaughs (4), Madame, Pearl, Willie and Bibb (sic); the Marions (3), Frank, Millie and Lizzie; Ami Picard, wire walker and ascensionist, the Three Brilliants,

brother act and bars; Fred and Trixie Evans, the clowns; John Foster (the last of the old ones); John Eallet, the English jester, his first appearance in America; Dick Sands, the old timer; and several others in the concert." Although this roster differs somewhat from that previously given, the original roster may have been accurate for the initial Jersey City dates and if the theorized week's layoff occurred, then the reconstructed roster follows as being normal under such circumstances.

The circus was then scheduled to play Newark on May 19-21. Nothing in the local papers has corroborated these dates. Similarly no newspaper ads confirm the return to Jersey City, May 22-24. However, the *Jersey City Journal* contained the following squib: "A local circus not a regular row, but the regular thing. Van Amberg's (sic) railroad show exhibited under canvas yesterday afternoon and evening. A parade was given in the afternoon. The circus is run by Jersey City people."

This is the first mention that the outfit was on rails. It also indicates obliquely that Robbins was domiciled in that city. The May 30 *Clipper* provided a brief not that portends a basis for concern about the future.

"Chas. Higgins, who went out with Van Amburgh's Circus, is at home again. He remarks that business with the show was every eccentric, and salaries accordingly. The circus was here (Jersey City) 21-23, and will possibly take a fresh start." Yet in the next week's *Clipper* another rather lengthy article about the latest happenings held, "(t)he show still holds forth daily, and the business has been such that the managers are fully convinced that their investment will be a success. The show is well handled; every department is in charge of a competent person, with years of experience. Out ring performances are fully up to the stan-



dard. Dave Costello is equestrian director, and as he was brought up by the old Dan Costello it's a convincing proof that he understands his business. His wife, Mlle. Ada, rides a splendid principal, and her manage act is always received with loud acclamations, as is also the burlesque manage done on a donkey by John Waller, the English clown. John and the Jack keep them roaring from start to finish. Pearl Forepaugh's acts startle and astonish her audience nightly. Artie Costello, a brother of Dave, does a fine swinging perch. The Marians, Frank and Millie, do a strong Japanese ladder act, so strong that we finish the show with it. Old Dick Sands is one of the features of the concert, also Fred and Trixie Evans. Prof. Sanwell's dogs and monkeys are also a distinct feature. We remain in Brooklyn this week and then take to the woods." It should be remembered that Brooklyn was at that time a grouping of neighborhoods that often had some distance in between. As such, nightly moves to a new neighborhood makes sense. Whether these moves were effected by rail or overland is not reported but it would seem that overland would be very practical and less costly. Sufficient drayage could be

secured locally to move the show.

Then Van Amburgh apparently played a number of stands in Queens in the same manner as Brooklyn. While Queens was nearly as populated as Brooklyn, it did have clusters of people in such places as Newtown (6/5), Flushing (6/6), and College Point (6/7). When a New Yorker today is speaking to another New Yorker, he/she will identify themselves as coming from Flatbush or College Point and the other party will (or at least should) know exactly where the point of reference is located. The boundaries of these neighborhoods are so precisely defined. The next couple of weeks were spent on Frank A.

Robbins' old hunting grounds of Long Island. Stands at Hempstead (6/16), Sayville (6/23), Bayshore (6/24), Rockville Center (6/26) and Far Rockaway (6/27) have been specifically identified by ads. In addition, old favorites such as Riverhead, Greenport, Sag Harbor, Southampton, and Babylon are also likely to have been visited. Good business and reviews were had in Sayville although the paper also reported a few scams in play. It wouldn't be a Robbins' run show without them.

The last few days in June found it back on the west side of the Hudson. At Bergen Point (Bayonne) on June 29, employee Frank Taylor was seriously bitten by a vicious stallion. Mr. Taylor was in the habit of equipping himself with a heavy club when engaged in the feeding of this horse but on this occasion failed to do so. (an enlightened human/animal interface technique.) The horse caught Taylor's forearm between his teeth, and it was considered a miracle that the member was not crushed. Stapleton (Staten Island) was played the next day, and it is reasonable to assume that Tottenville and Port Richmond followed in some order. It was then back to the mainland at Perth Amboy, New Jersey on July 3. The Nation's birthday was celebrated at Barnegat where the local paper confirmed that a parade was given. Barnegat is seventy or so miles south of Perth Amboy, and is a Jersey Shore resort town, played during the peak of the tourist season.

The *Clipper* of July 4 contained the following ad: "WANTED, Circus Performers of All Kinds. Also flat and stock cars. Answer per route. Frank A. Robbins. Van Amburgh Shows." He may have been planning to switch to a traditional flat car circus although there is no record that this actually occurred. In addition, the fact that he was advertising for performers at this stage of the season would certainly indicated that he was losing some of his original roster. Payrolls may have been missed and given the first class performers he

had on board, they wouldn't tolerate this situation very long.

Meanwhile at Toms River (7/6), produced only light business. The paucity of patrons may have resulted from the poor showing of the parade. As the paper put it, "Cohen's sleigh bells outdid the circus parade as an advertising scheme." Clearly the parade left something to the imagination. The extensive New Jersey tour continued. At Eatontown (7/11), it was the first circus there in 23 years. As a result, both the afternoon and night performances were largely attended, including a number of people coming from nearby communities. Cranford was visited on July 14 and played to over 500 patrons. More importantly the local paper reported that the circus traveled on three railroad cars, thereby providing us with our only true sense of the show's sizing. The next day at Dunellon there was a light matinee, but 500 paid at night. Probably a total gross for the day of the big show, side show and refreshment stands of less than \$200. The manager (Robbins?) was reported to say that business has been remarkable at these small size towns such as Dunellon. There was similar good news at Somerville (7/16) where a full night house followed a light afternoon. The towners enjoyed the performance very much. Clinton (7/17) is our last hard date although German Valley (7/18), Rockaway (7/20), Port Oram (7/21), Charlotts-burg (7/22) and Franklin Furnace (7/23) allegedly followed. In the *Clipper* of July 18 it was noted that Charles and Gladys Orville had joined the performance. The trail ends at this point. It could be that the tour continued playing very small towns throughout New Jersey and perhaps Pennsylvania. It is doubted that the season produced any meaningful profits. On the other hand, it is doubted that much money was lost. Because Robbins did not repeat this format in 1897, one questions whether the three car

Positively the Only Circus this Season!

BAYONNE, N.J.
FRIDAY, APRIL 29, 1898.

The Famous and Only

THE ALL-CONQUERING, JUSTLY CELEBRATED
FRANK A. ROBBINS



Enlarged & Bigger than Ever.

10---Consolidated Exhibitions---10

CIRCUS---MUSEUM---AVIRY---MENAGERIE

A Mighty and Imposing Array of Glittering Attractions.

THE GREATEST ACTS EVER SEEN IN A RING!

Prices Cut in Two for This Season.

Admission to all 25c. - - - Children under 9, afternoons, 10c

Grand Free Street Procession on the Day of Exhibition.

Newspaper ad for the 1898 Robbins show. Author's collection.

arrangement was considered to be worth the effort. And Robbins needed a winning formula, not just something to do during the summer months. He had a lot of mouths to feed including his own.

1897/1898--remember the Maine--and Hartford too

At least 1896 had not been a disaster which unfortunately had become the modus vivendi in every circus ownership initiative undertaken by Robbins since and including the Winter Circus of 1887-1888. Not a particular desirable performance record to maintain. Whether he actually made a complete season in 1896 is not known but he seemed to be prepared take another stab at it in 1897. But what exactly was the "it" that he was attempting? Presumably "it" was a traveling circus, but nothing has been uncovered that reveals if "it" was a repeat of the gilly circus or something more ambitious such as a flat car railer or a large wagon show.

Early in the new year, the *Clipper*

was blessed with the following placement: "Wanted for the rank F. A. Robbins people in every branch of the circus business. Riders with their own stock, a Troupe of Performing Ponies. Man to put on Spectacular, Ladies for Ballet and Marches. Frank A. Robbins, Lessee and Manager, 645 Communipaw Ave. Jersey City, New Jersey."

Dissecting this ad as we are disposed to doing, one notes the title of Great New York Circus probably meant that this was to be a small circus and may well be an indication of an overland show: the use of the legal notion of lessee and manager indicates that a corporation may have been formed that held the assets

and Mattie Robbins and others may have been the principals of this corporation, and Robbins was not. In fact, he probably did not have any overt financial interest but was merely an employee. Lastly the address of 645 Communipaw Avenue was the first found use of this location that continued as the winter quarters for many years in the future.

The *Clipper* of March 20 advised that the New York Circus signed Miles Orton as equestrian director; Alfred W. Miaco, conductor of spectacle and pantomime; the Julian Family, gymnasts; Linda Jeal, rider; the Orton Family; the Miaco Family; and 24 ladies for spectacle and pantomime (who conducted this count). It reported that the season would open in Jersey City on Saturday, April 24, and that the scenery and costumes for the spectacle and pantomime would be new. An impressive plan and attention grabber to be sure even if it might have been somewhat overstated, particularly in the number of ladies for the spectacle and pantomime. The next week's issue revealed that the Julian family con-

sisted of William Julian, Linda Jeal, La Petit Dallee, somersault equestrian and Lola Julian. The engagement of an unidentified wire act was also noted. As the season approached, the show was still attempting to complete its performer listing. Robbins continued to seek lady gymnasts, acrobats, jugglers, rope dancer etc. as late as April 24. Interested parties were to report directly to the show lot in Jersey City. The local correspondent advised the *Clipper* that the New York Circus played Jersey City April 24-28 and Oakland Park (in Jersey City) on May 3 and 4.

That entry was the final data point on this venture. It may be reasonably assumed that the show never got out of Jersey City and no further activity in this regard was pursued during this 1897 season. In September the *Clipper* advised that Robbins was on the Sig Sautelle Wagon Circus as general manager. It wouldn't be the last time.

If the 1897 season faded quietly into nothingness, the 1898 season was nothing of the kind. Apparently after planning throughout the latter part of 1897, Robbins put together a new corporation that included some impressive names as investors and principals.

The *Clipper* of January 29 carried the important news item that "The Frank A. Robbins United Show, enlarged, and with an added menagerie and museum and a train of new railroad cars, will be on the road next season. A new partnership has been formed. Frank A. Robbins will be the manager, Gil Robinson, director general, John W. Hamilton, general advance manager, and W. A. Conklin, financial manager." Gil Robinson was the well known son of the original John Robinson and had been in the circus business since childhood. He was involved both as an executive and performer. He had a long term relationship with Robbins. Messrs. Hamilton and

Conklin were professional circus executives, who enjoyed long careers in the business. Whether this was a partnership in the legal sense as this article states or actually a corporation as sources in the future strongly imply, is not firmly determined. It may have originally been a partnership which later was reconstituted as a corporate entity. This structure becomes important later in the season.



Miles Orton equestrian director of the 1898 Robbins circus. Pfening Archives.

The only ad found in the *Clipper* relative to the circus was in early April which indicated that the circus still required some advance men, performers and a band. The need for a band at this late period was not a positive sign. Nevertheless, it opened on April 28 in Jersey City to allegedly big business. It was also report that supporting John Hamilton in the advance was William Cahill, boss biller, John Barrett, Bob Hammond, C. J. Carroll and Frank O'Neil. The next day a short haul was made to Bayonne where the afternoon show was lost because of very heavy rains. The show advertised the presence of Mlle. Cleveland (Jeanne or Mrs. Louise De Mott Stickney?) who was claimed to be the only female bareback rider who could turn somersaults. Departing Bayonne the rains continued resulting in great difficulty for men and beast moving the circus. It may have traveled to Staten Island for a couple of dates as was customary for a Frank A. Robbins circus. If so, all moves were made overland until returning to Jersey City quarters to pick up the train which was later revealed to be nine back with one in advance.

Heading north, Nyack, New York was scheduled and played on Tuesday, May 3. The show advertised an admission price of 25 cents.

A street parade was given to the delight of the local small boys. Pete Conklin, the famous Shakespearean jester and Charles Ewers, the celebrated bareback rider were claimed to be in the performance. Rhinebeck, New York was played on Monday, May 9. This Hudson River town provided the only substantive after notice on the circus. "Frank A. Robbins' Circus arrived by special train on the P. R. & N. E. Railroad at an early hour on Sunday and in a remarkably short time had their tents pitched on the Chestnut Street grounds. The parade which took place at noon on Monday was not very imposing, being composed simply of a gaily painted wagon containing the band. The performance was excellent and far above average. The trained dogs were especially fine while the bareback riding was the best ever seen here. The afternoon performance was so well liked that in the evening the big tent was scarcely able to accommodate the hundreds who gathered to see the show. The circus has been on the road less than two weeks and owing to the almost continuous rain during that time, the management has not had an easy or profitable experience. There was the usual side show which was well patronized and a concert. Fakirs were much in evidence to the sorrow it is said, of some of Rhinebeck's young men. By midnight the circus had taken its departure and quiet reigned supreme." A very frank recital of the business condition of the show, which could only come from a circus executive, most likely Mr. Robbins. One can almost predict what would happen now. The real questions are where and under what circumstances, and not if. True to the finest Robbins traditions, as it actually transpired, it was not at a single location but a drawn out affair in three different towns. Robbins never but never did things in a small way and 1898 was not any different.

Following the relatively good day at Rhinebeck, the show took a fairly long jump to the village of Collinsville, in north central Connecticut.

For openers, there was a strike by the band because of non-payment of due wages. This action was followed by the railroad putting an attachment on the rail cars because the circus could not pay its bill of \$90. Finally when the band issue was settled in some fashion and the rail bill was paid, the impression given in this local report that the day was lost. Not to be outdone, at the next stand Winsted (5/11), the day was lost because the P. R. & N. E. would not allow the circus cars to be transferred to the Naugatuck Railroad for unloading. Probably again due to failure to pay for the rail move. Not lacking good ideas, the show was hauled overland about ten miles south over very hilly terrain to its next scheduled date at Torrington (5/12). This day was reported to be quite good. Then the circus was hauled overland back to Winsted for a wildcat date (5/13). There is no report as to its success nor what occurred on the next date or where in fact the next date took place.

As if these events weren't enough, the excitement built to a fitting crescendo; that taking place in the large city of Hartford, Connecticut. What was a small show like Robbins doing in the State Capital? Probably because there was no money to move it daily and perhaps many city folks would respond in having a circus there for an entire week. Hartford was only 40 miles east of Winsted and there must have sufficient money to get the outfit there for the start of the engagement on May 16. If it was lucky and drew the necessary patronage then the tour would resume. If not then it was over. As a matter of note, Buffalo Bill was scheduled to play Hartford on May 26 and Ringling was following shortly thereafter on June 15. It is clear that if Frank A. Robbins' crew was intending to do any last minute billing, they would be hard press to find any valuable space as it was taken up by the Buffalo Bill advance and the Ringling opposition hordes. There were no newspaper ads found and given the scarcity of funds, there

probably weren't any placed. Without billboard advertising and newspaper placements, how was the circus going public to know that Mr. Robbins was in town? Either they didn't know or didn't care what with the biggies coming, and this fact bore bitter fruit in a very short time frame.

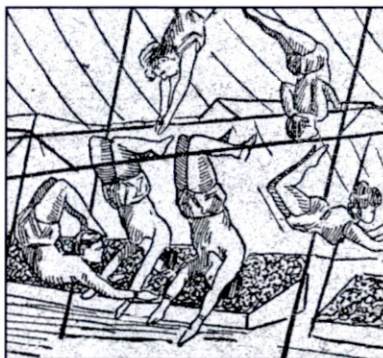
On May 19 *The Hartford Daily Courant*, the city's leading newspaper and the paper of record, told the story as it evolved. Under the headline "CIRCUS STRANDED HERE" it allowed "Frank A.

Robbins' grand allied circus and menagerie of four animals is stranded on the siding of the Philadelphia, Reading & New England Railroad about half a mile above Sargeant Street. The railroad company wants \$50 to draw the show out of town, therefore Hartford has a circus on its hands. It might have an elephant on its hands but the pride of the circus happens to be a kangaroo. The show made one attempt to jump the town, but it was not successful in this line as the kangaroo.

"The circus has had four weeks of bad weather and this city is threatened with a week of bad circus. One of the managers said last night that the coming of the show here was a mistake. The place where the show intended to go would cost \$600 to reach (must have been San Francisco). Hartford was reached cheaper but it proved costly in the end. The show was billed here for a week at Laurel Street. It was too rainy to show Monday and the attendance was small on Tuesday. Yesterday (Wednesday) the show was tied up with attachments and the animal trainer said that there were so many that he believed that his fiercest beast would form an attachment for him. The attachments were placed by the butcher, the baker and the hotel keeper. The latter was first in the field. Five of the advance men owed the Brower House \$17 for

board and when W. L. Crowley heard that the show intended to do the kangaroo act, he took Deputy Sheriff Hetherton to make an attachment Tuesday night. The butcher and baker also had attachments and these were served by Constable Taussig.

"The latter attached the hyena for one thing. Having come out victorious in his legal battle with a faith healer, he felt fully prepared for the hyena. Mr. Taussig said yesterday that he



intended to get something to feed the beast with. The show people attended to the feeding and the constable did not have to buy any strawberries. The hyena, bear, kangaroo and one other animal were all fed yesterday. The rent of the circus lot, \$25, was not paid. . . and this means another attachment. The railroad refused to pull the train out unless \$50 was forthcoming and this money was not in sight at a late hour last night. One of the managers said that there was a man in the show who had a receipt for six barrels of whisky and he thought that this would secure any one who would be kind enough to give a bond to release of the attachments. The men were quite discouraged last night.

"It was said that all the property is leased. Buffalo Bill owns one of the cars, three are hired from the railroad company and five belong to the show. It could not be learned who the proprietor is. Mrs. Robbins was said to have an interest in it and Mr. Robbins was said to have a few shares. A man who was pointed out as Frank A. Robbins proudly showed about 75 cents and he started out to put the finishing touches on a large and growing 'jag.' He was the happiest man in the crowd. One manager (there are as many managers as animals) said he thought it would be a good idea for the mayor to have the attachments released so that the

show could get out of the state. He said he did not know what the canvassmen would do if they got hungry.

"It was learned that the circus intended to go to Windsor Locks (about 20 miles north of Hartford) and then to Springfield (Massachusetts) and continue through the East. Now it is intended to go to Campbell Hall in New York and reorganize. The show is said to be a good one of its kind and Mrs. Stickney, the bareback rider, is said to be without a rival. The police have had no reports of boys running away to join the circus."

The *Hartford Times* covered the event in a more succinct fashion on the same day. Being an afternoon paper as opposed to the *Courant* being a morning one, it had some additional information on the attachments: "Bandwagons, wild beasts and other property were seized and, as the railroad company also had claims, the circus cars remained on the track near the Driving Club Park all night. This morning the railroad officials were satisfied and the circus cars were attached to the six o'clock freight, bound for Campbell Hall, New York. 'Bob' Stickney and Mrs. Stickney, well known circus people, are with the show. It is said that the outfit is leased and the owner of the half dozen animals came here from New York last night to replevin them." (Replevin is a legal action by an owner in good standing to recapture chattel goods in the hands of another.)

A week later another twist to this sad tale was discussed. Constable Taussig was disturbed that the railroad permitted the show property to leave town. As such, as any righteous law officer would do, he sued the railroad. As may be recalled, the Constable attached several animals, a flat car and five wagons which were on the flat car. He relied on the statements allegedly made by the cognizant railroad official that the flat car and its contents would not be removed. Then the railroad hauled the train, which included the subject flat car, out of the state. The

Constable also was visited by a William Bartel of New York, a dealer in wild animals. This gentleman claimed that he owned the animals under attachment and apparently satisfied the Constable of the veracity of his statements. The animals were turned over to Mr. Bartel.

In the *Courant* of May 24, the final chapter of this saga was written. Under the headline "Frank A. Robbins, it was reported that Frank A. Robbins is to retire from the circus business. He has been heard of as a circus manager in this section of the country for the past twenty-six years at which time he started out. He evidently has not found the business profitable (an understatement if there ever was one) and has decided to retire from that branch of entertainment. Robbins made the announcement in the city yesterday. He said that after all the long years he had been manager and proprietor of a circus, all he had to show for it was the clothes on his back and the only cash his wife had was \$1.26 on deposit to her credit in a New York bank.

"Robbins and his wife came to this city to be present at the hearings and Mr. Robbins stated that he had no money to engage a lawyer to look after his interests. He was accompanied by his wife and two children. One of the children, Mrs. Robbins said was five years old and the other was three and one half years. Robbins claimed that if \$10 would release him from all the litigation he could not raise that amount, but he was well loaded with leases and other documents which he introduced in the hearings.

"The Frank A. Robbins Show, according to documents introduced was made up of a company consisting of Robbins and other New Yorkers named Robinson, Conklin and Hamilton. They were the owners of certain property which was shipped from this state before the attachments were levied upon by Constable

Taussing. This property was in his wife's name as leasee and sublet to the show. Under the lease which Mrs. Robbins had with the alleged owners of the property, she was to pay the owners \$25 a week for the use of the property and the Frank A. Robbins Circus under the lease which she had with it, was to pay her \$50 per week. Robbins cried several times during the hearings but he presented his claim so ably that it

was believed the leases were bona fide and the justices in the different actions gave judgment against the show and not Mrs. Robbins, and her property which was under attachment was ordered released."

So the nub of the story is that the good citizens of Hartford were left with no property to attach in relief of the monies due them. It isn't that Robbins and his associates came out ahead of this mess either, because they must have paid a fair amount out of their private resources to organize the show and to keep it going. Nobody won here; not even Constable Taussig who presented flawed service of process against the railroad which negated that potential suit. As a final comment, the newspaper noted that the show was now at Campbell Hall, tied up, as it is, unable to pay charges which the railroad had against it. Everyone seems to have lost from this misadventure. All this, plus the Battleship Maine blew up in Havana harbor. Some years nothing goes right.

The Pawnee Bill route book of 1898 reported that on June 1 in Middletown, New York, a number of visitors from the defunct Frank A. Robbins circus visited, the most prominent of which was Frank A. himself. Mr. Robbins apparently was there on business because he sold Pawnee Bill a wagon and a sleeping car which were delivered the next day at Port Jervis, New York. Were those crocodile tears shed at Hartford? I don't suppose we shall ever know. But we do know this-- with Robbins, life continues.



Side Lights On The Circus Business

PART EIGHTEEN

By David W. Watt

Editor's note. The dates listed are the days the article appeared in the Janesville, Wisconsin Gazette.

October 17, 1914

For more than a quarter of a century the Wallace-Hagenbeck shows that had been owned and managed by Ben Wallace for all that time up to this year, have made their winter quarters at Peru, Ind. About something more than a year ago a stock company took over the show and during the season made up their minds to change the winter quarters of the show to some other city. As soon as this was known the country over, there were tempting offers coming from different cities urging the great show to make its winter home with them.

Among the prominent cities which sent delegates to confer with the management were St. Louis, by its Business Men's club; Indianapolis, Commercial club; Cincinnati, Chamber of Commerce, and delegates from Perry, Ia. Many other cities also were anxious that the show make its home during the winter with them. It finally, after considering the different cities and what they had to offer, decided for at least this winter to make its headquarters at Cincinnati. But while this will be the headquarters, all the horses will be sent to West Baden, Ind. where quarters for the winter are already well under way. While Peru made a fight to retain the show, the management seemed to think it best to winter in a larger city where better advantages could be obtained in certain ways. More than one town in Indiana has been the winter quarters for different shows, and many of them have spent thousands of dollars in these towns in the way of hotels,

theaters, business blocks and beautiful homes.

Bloomington, Ind., has certainly shown the right spirit. The leading paper came out with a tribute to its showmen citizens and in a full column article pointed out that its circus citizens have been the means of developing hundreds of thousands of dollars of valuable property. Those chiefly pointed out are W. W. Durand who, until his death, was a member of Barnum & Bailey's circus and who in 1870 built the foremost business

block; B. Gentry who built the Gentry hotel, now the Bowles block, a venture twenty years ahead of its time, as well as developing other important property; Robert H. Harris, who built the Harris Grand Theater and more recently the Princess; J. W. Gentry who built among other valuable property one of the prettiest domiciles of the town; likewise Frank Gentry; Sam B. Dill and Roy Feltus who last year spent \$1,800 in remodeling a home already considered one of the beauty spots of Bloomington and who is now developing some bungalow property along real estate lines; Harry Howard who has returned to his native town from Long Island and who recently spent \$3,000 improving property which he owns. This is a tribute well deserved that reflects credit upon the editorial talent of the Indiana city.

Newspaper ad used by Sells-Floto in 1914. Pfening Archives.

**MONDAY, 14
September 14**

SELLS-FLOTO CIRCUS
25 CENTS

**BIGGEST CIRCUS
IN THE WORLD!**

COL. W. F. CODY (Buffalo Bill)
Will Positively Appear in Parade and
Salute You From the Saddle at the

2 PERFORMANCES 2
AFTERNOON 2:15 DAILY NIGHT 8:15
COME DOWN TOWN

When one considers what the Ringlings and Gollmars have done for Baraboo, Wis., what Tammen and Bonfiles have done for Denver; what John Robinson has done for Terrace Park, O.; what the Miller Bros. have done for Bliss, Okla.; what Robbins has done for Jersey City; and what Jerry Mugivan, Charles Sparks and Pete and George Sun are now doing, the value of showmen citizenship looms up indisputably.

On Sept. 30 the Sells-Floto and Buffalo Bill show showed in Danville, 111. Danville is known as the home of the Illinois congressman, Uncle Joe Cannon, who has been famous the world over for many years. It was here that Uncle Joe and his old friend, W. F. Cody (Buffalo Bill) met for the first time in several years.

Just before the parade was ready to start, Uncle Joe with his family motored to the show grounds. As Buffalo Bill was in the head carriage, he insisted on his old friend getting in the carriage with him and heading the parade. This Uncle Joe did, and he had no sooner taken his seat beside his old friend than the camera fiends began to click their machines in every direction, all anxious to get a picture of the two great men who had been famous the world over for so many years. Many of the camera workers finished their pictures during the day and presented one to each of their subjects with the name of the operator written on the back. It is fair to say that these will be kept as souvenirs for many years to come.

Many of the great circuses of the country are now trying to decide whether or not it would be a good business proposition for them to show in San Francisco at the Pan-American exposition next year. The World's Fair held in Chicago in 1893 proved to be a bad proposition for the big circuses that year. The only show that made any money in Chicago that year was the Buffalo Bill show, which was located adjoining the world's fair grounds. This proved to be a great bonanza. The Barnum show was located on the lakefront early in August where its contract called for a two weeks' engagement and as much longer as it was deemed advisable to remain; but the great show had only been opened for a few days when James A. Bailey knew that this was a bad venture.

I was in Chicago a few days after the show opened and visited it at the matinee in the afternoon. Mr. Bailey handed me a ticket for a box, which contained six seats. I told him that I did not have anyone with me and one seat was all I cared for. He said that I must take this box and that it was for my friends and me as long as I was in Chicago. At that matinee in the afternoon there was not more than a quarter of a house, and the two weeks contracted for proved to be too long for the great show. It was said that it lost at least \$25,000 in the two weeks. It seemed that the attractions at the great fair, both afternoon and

evening, were too great and people seemed to think they would have plenty of time to see a circus at some future day, but there would never be but one world's fair.

October 24, 1914

This is the month that will wind up the season of 1914 with all the great circuses of the country, some of which have already gone into winter quarters. It will only be a short time until the winter quarters will be as busy a place for the circus owners as it was on the road during the season. All the shoes will be pulled off of the horses and they will be, for the most part, turned out to rough it for most of the winter. All the wagons and harnesses will be overhauled and made as good as new. And with most of them, many new ones will be added to the coming season of 1915.

The Sells-Floto and Buffalo Bill Shows closed at Wichita on the 15th of this month. The Ringling shows will close October 24th at Cairo, Ill., and the Barnum Show at Memphis, Tenn., on the 26th. The time was when these large shows made a trip through the South and would run up sometimes near the holidays before closing, but this many times proved to be a bad investment.

The boys on advertising car No. 1

Dan Rice, famous clown and circus owner. Circus World Museum collection.



of the great Ringling show closed their work at Cairo, M., on October 3rd, and from there they went direct to their winter quarters in Baraboo. The boys wanted to do something unusual and covered the billboards there with an advertisement out of the ordinary. They want the circus folks to note the big "Home Sweet Home" stand on Commercial Avenue and Thirteenth Street, a 24-sheet depicting the old home and father, mother and baby greeting the wanderer's return. A 3-sheet with names of the boys on car No. 1 is a feature of this attractive showing. The Cairo papers devoted considerable space to this attractive showing.

It was in 1866, two years after Adam Forepaugh's debut in the circus business, that he hired the famous clown Dan Rice for a season of 26 weeks and paid Mr. Rice \$26,000 for his 26 week's work. This was by far the largest salary ever paid to any one individual before or since in the circus business; but Dan Rice's name at that time was the great drawing card of the country, as he was far better known than either P. T. Barnum or Adam Forepaugh.

The following winter of 1866 and 1867 Dan Rice organized a show of his own and came west showing in Janesville in September. The show pitched their tents in the courthouse park, the main entrance being near where the fountain now stands. The horse stable there was only one that time was located on the bank of the river near the old jail. At that time the late Judge H. A. Patterson had a law office in the small wooden building adjoining the present site of the Ziegler Clothing Company. It was there between the afternoon and the night show that Judge Patterson united in marriage a clown, who was an understudy of Dan Rice, and one of the lady performers of the show. Dan Rice with several others of the show witnessed the ceremony in Judge Patterson's office.

The following is the advertisement which appeared in the *Gazette* 47 years ago of the great show and what they had to offer to the public: "DAN RICE'S Great Show and School of Educated Animals, Col. Dan Rice, Director.

"The advance of the above named institution through this section of

the country is an event of the greatest importance to the public, as it is an organization combining all that is moral, instructive and entertaining and discarding all the elements (found in so many traveling exhibitions) that would in the slightest degree prove offensive to the most sensitive and pious mind. The great show and animal school, under the immediate supervision of the distinguished scholar and humorist Col. Dan Rice, claims superiority over all its rivals in all the points essential to the perfection of a moral and amusing exhibition.

"The great event of the amusement world for the season of '67 is the re-entree of Dan Rice in his popular role of the American Humorists, or clown to the arena. This event has only been brought about by the most earnest persuasion and the great desire of the public to once more behold this patriotic gentleman in his original character, and as this is more than probably Mr. Rice's farewell tour, none would fall to hear his humorous and learned expositions of the great events of the day. Remember, therefore, that Dan Rice will most positively appear at each and every exhibition of the great show, assuredly without fail, as clown to the arena.

"The perfect equipment of the entire exhibition has been the study of the management, and everything will be found complete and elegant, the wagons, trappings, etc. have been renovated and equipped in the most supreme manner, and in the grand street parade, which will take place daily at about 10 a.m., will form a blaze of splendor seldom, if ever, equaled. The Mammoth Pavilion will be complete in all its details and will be so arranged as to afford the best possible accommodations to the public while comfortable seats will be provided for all. The ring performance which is under the practiced eye of Col. Dan Rice will positively be, beyond a doubt, the best in America."

October 31, 1914

Through the courtesy of D. R. Morrissey of this city who for eight years has been the head blacksmith and horse shoer with the Ringling show, I am enabled to give you the



following details of the closing of the great show and the home coming, the closing of which was at Cairo, Mo., on Saturday night, October 24th, where the band played *Home Sweet Home* after the evening performance. It was then that more than a thousand people commenced to get their belongings together and start for their homes or for new jobs for the winter, as the case might be.

The show got loaded at about one o'clock at night and started on their long run for their winter quarters at Baraboo, a distance of 527 miles. The train was made up in four sections, and on account of it being Sunday, had a clear track for most of the run which they made in nominal time.

The sections were kept about one hour apart. The first one arrived in Alton at 4 o'clock Monday morning and pulled into the winter quarters at Baraboo a few minutes before ten. Considering that there were twenty-two cars in each train, all sixty feet or more in length, and all heavily loaded, this was one of the best long runs ever made by the show.

For years back in the business many strange stories are told of separations of families, of boys leaving home and not hearing from their relatives in years. One of the strangest of these happened this last season with the Ringlings. Twenty-one years ago James S. Miller, then 19 years old, left his home in Louisville, Tenn., to go prospecting in Alaska. He went to Minnesota and met a man who persuaded him to join him in an acrobatic act with the Barnum & Bailey circus. Miller joined. Two years later his friend died. For the last twenty-one years Miller has

been traveling with the circus now known as the Ringling Brothers. In all that time he has not seen the mother and four brothers he left behind in the little town of Tennessee. After waiting for news of their brother, the family moved to Nashville. Two of the brothers, J. L. and Stanley, came to Chicago. Last Sunday Ringling Brothers was playing in Nashville. Before the show a friend asked Miller if he had seen his mother. Throwing down a costume he had in his hand, he ran with the friend to his mother's house a few blocks away. His mother gave him the Chicago address of his two brothers and yesterday for the first time in twenty-one years they saw their brother. Seated at the dinner table with his brothers last Wednesday night, Miller told his story. He is now the head of the Miller family acrobats with an income of \$1,500 a week.

A few days ago a friend of mine said to me, "I don't see how you could sit in that ticket wagon all day long, sell tickets and pay bills and count up your money and take care of everything exactly right with the noise of the side show band across the way, the loud voices of the side show talkers ringing in your ears and then the band in the big top not so far away playing all the time. I should think that it would have set you wild." But do you know that my business as it came along was the only thing I thought of; and the side show talkers and the bands playing—why I never heard them. After a long hard day's work I could go to my state room and go to bed and though perhaps twenty fast railroad trains might pass us during the night, I would seldom wake up until morning and then would be as well rested as though I had slept in some quiet out of the way place. I think as a rule this was so with nearly everyone with the show. Their own business seemed to be the only thing that bothered them; and when that was done, both body and mind were at rest, regardless of the noise of the surroundings.

Nearly everyone has seen trained animals of all kinds, elephants, lions, tigers, ponies and even pigs and geese, but I dare say but few people ever saw a large cage of trained canary birds. In a small town in Iowa

years ago a landlord had a large wooden cage with perhaps a dozen or fifteen canary birds. These birds he had trained to both feed and water themselves. They would draw the water from the well that they drank from. The well consisted of a small tin cup about the shape of a hand goblet, and the bucket was about the size of a small thimble. This was attached to a string which was fastened in the cage, and when the birds would get thirsty, they would take hold of the string and draw up the thimble bucket with about half a thimbleful of water in it, and after drinking would drop the bucket back into the well, as the landlord caused it. This each bird would do once or twice a day, as they might need water. A little small paper wagon about the same size was placed outside the cage on a little incline runway and the landlord would fill with birdseed, which held about the same, as did the bucket in the well. And with the string attached to the little paper wagon, the canaries would get hold of the string and pull the little wagon up to the cage where they could reach it. This landlord took great pride in showing his trained birds, which he said were the finest in the country, and they certainly were a novelty to look at.

In 1886 we were billed to show in Gloversville, N. Y., on Monday and arrived there early Sunday morning. On arriving at the hotel I found that the Gilbert (and Sullivan company) were billed there for the week and Verona Jarbeau was the star. As she had played in Janesville several times I knew her and she was not long in telling me that she must see the great circus Monday afternoon.

Jarbeau was a French woman and in private life was Mrs. Jeff Bernstein. She, with her company, took in the matinee performance of the circus in the afternoon and stayed long after the show was out, visiting with Mr. and Mrs. Forepaugh, for they had been friends for years. I recollect well of her telling Adam Forepaugh that as soon as she made money enough in the hall show business, she would have a circus of her own. But little Jarbeau, who has entertained thousands of people of Janesville in light opera at the Myers, is no more. Verona

Jarbeau, in private life Mrs. Verona Bernstein, widow of a theatrical manager, and a comic opera actress years ago, succumbed to a complication of diseases at her home in Namuet, N.Y. October 16th. The



deceased was 53 years old and first gained renown in the Gilbert and Sullivan operas. She was the original Yum Yum in *Mikado* produced by the Standard Company and also took the part of Hebe in *H.M.S. Pinafore*.

November 7, 1914

The large circuses of the country had no more than closed until all the people, especially those with novelty acts, were back into the vaudeville circuits in different lines of work. After the closing of the great Ringling show in Cairo on Saturday evening, the following Monday a division of the Rhoda Royal high school horses opened at the great northern Hippodrome in Chicago. It goes without saying that Rhoda Royal had more well trained high school horses than any man in the business. These are divided up into several divisions and sent out in different circuits among the vaudeville horses for the winter.

The troupe at the great northern hippodrome is small, consisting of one elephant, one horse, a pony and a dog, but these are among the highest trained ones of them all. The elephant takes charge of the show, and the dog, which insists on doing a little clown work, is finally taken up in the trunk of the elephant and set down in his place on the stage and given to understand by Mr. Elephant that he must stay there until he is called for. While this is one of the smallest troupes sent out by Mr. Royal, it is also one of the highest classed cast of its kind in the country and never fails to make a hit and hold a long engagement wherever it goes.

It was in the winter and spring of 1884 that Sam Watson, European agent for Adam Forepaugh, brought over the largest importation of animals of all kinds as well as many foreign performances from Europe. The importation consisted of ten elephants, half dozen camels, several different kinds of cage animals and twelve high leaping trained dogs. These dogs for the most part were the tall slim kind who were fast runners and high jumpers with the exception of one. This one was what was known as a Russian boarhound and was very large and said to weight 240 pounds and had every appearance, as his name would indicate of being a very vicious dog.

Old Brindle, the boarhound, would do the same leaps as the other dogs, but it was not long before his legs commenced to give out under his ponderous weight, and Brindle was taken out of the leaps and given to the boss animal man in the menagerie to care for. Old Brindle had one of the best dispositions. He was everybody's friend. In many towns during the summer where it was impossible to get water for all the menagerie and it had to be carried from nearby wells, Brindle would help with half dozen boys to carry the water, and he would carry as much as one of the boys. He seemed to enjoy it too. At the close of the show that fall, young Forepaugh gave Brindle to a friend of his who kept a hotel near the winter quarters of the show. It was there that old Brindle ended his days several years later.

It was during that summer with the show that Brindle and Babe, the big elephant who was always ready to help get a heavy wagon out of the mud, became great friends. Many times on a stormy night when all the rest of the elephants would be sent to the train, Babe would be kept back in case some of the wagons might get in the mud. When Babe was kept on the lot, old Brindle would refuse to go into his car. When everything was finished and the men would get their lunch, old Brindle and Babe would walk up to the lunch stand and get their lunch.

Nineteen hundred and fourteen will be recorded in circus history as Barnum & Bailey's "lucky year," but

to a power more potent than luck must be attributed the unprecedented good fortune which has followed the "Greatest Show on Earth" from its opening at Madison Square Garden Saturday afternoon, March 21, 1914, to the massed bands' playing of *Home Sweet Home* in Memphis, Tenn. October 26th when the "big show" closed its wonderful season—care, keen activity and diligent efficiency in the managerial and departmental organizations were the winning factors in the development of this "lucky year." Notwithstanding the fact of many mid-week stands, necessitating a railway journey of more than 150 miles, the "big show" did not miss one performance during the entire season; not one parade was cut, and the opening of the main entrance never delayed for more than fifty minutes after the advertised time of opening.

The business developed one long series of surprises, many of the New England, New York and Central West cities breaking all previous records of the show's visits. At Los Angeles the ticket wagons were closed on one occasion twenty-five minutes before eight no more tickets sold, no money taken at the entrance and enough people turned away to have filled the great arenic tent again, the arenic tent this season being the largest ever attempted, requiring eight center poles to hold the big top in place. The much discussed "cotton trouble" in Texas caused some uneasiness of mind, but El Paso, the show's first stand in Texas, turned out the largest crowd of people ever attending circus performances in that city, and so all through Texas. At Houston the afternoon attendance was a close second to Los Angeles' record crowd.

There were many pleasant incidents in connection with the closing performance in Memphis. Every one of the 1,200 members of the institution seemed to feel that the general happy atmosphere of the "lucky year" was individually theirs. The eighty-nine cars of paraphernalia, animals and people will soon be on their way to winter quarters at Bridgeport, Conn. Great activity has been in progress for several

weeks in the city, and the different departments are all ready to commence work, building and rebuilding the new equipment for the coming season. Promises were made that the "Panama Canal year" will witness a performance more than ever sustaining the title, "The Greatest Show on Earth."

Thursday of this week Mr. John Wolverton of Philadelphia, Pa., came to Janesville with his famous white models troupe consisting of one horse and four dogs. Thousands of people were a remembered of the models, which they saw with the Ringling show last summer in statuary. Mr. Wolverton has been trainer of high classed horses and other animals practically all his life and wherever an act of his, whether in the circus or in the vaudeville, bears his trademark, there is a guarantee of its high quality. Mr. Wolverton has been furnishing these and other acts of the

This 1880 W. W. Cole newspaper ad told of the show's electric lights. Pfening Archives.

AT COLUMBUS, OHIO,
NOT UNTIL MONDAY, MAY 10th.
1880
10 YEARS SUCCESSFUL! 10 TIMES ENLARGED!
 Embodying all the Obtainable Attractions of Both Worlds.
 Wonderful Costumes, Strange Animals, Scientific Marvels, Remarkable Performances, Wonderful Acts, Thrilling Performances, Original Representations, forming a spectacle wholly unique and all previous ones.
W. W. COLE'S MONSTER SHOWS,
 THE GREAT NEW YORK AND NEW ORLEANS
CIRCUS, MENAGERIE, AQUARIUM
 AND CONGRESS OF LIVING WONDERS.
LOT ON
HAMILTON AVENUE,
Between Long and Broad Sts.



ILLUMINATED WITH THE GRAND ELECTRIC LIGHT.
The New Idea that turns Night to Day. In contrast with a light all other lights are "feeble and vague."

high-class circuses for many years and numbers among his friends the highest-class horsemen the world over. The late Governor Stanford of California and great men of California to Maine are among his friends. Mr. Wolverton was a practical friend of the Forepaugh and Barnum people for many years and furnished more than one high class act in years gone by for them. He is putting in the week at the Myers Theatre and at the close will go back to Chicago where he will start in the vaudeville circuits for the winter. Mr. Wolverton also owns the famous Harry K. Thaw saddle mare. It has been several years since I have seen him before and was only too glad to have another visit with the famous horseman. More of Mr. Wolverton's kind would make the business higher class.

November 14, 1914

I am going to give you something of an insight on the lives and works of some of the great showmen that have gone down in history as men of original ideas and how they commenced in the business and try to give you an idea of some of the big things that these men did in their early career. These men were Adam Forepaugh, P. T. Barnum, James A. Bailey and W. W. Cole.

One of P. T. Barnum's greatest successes in his early career was his woolly horse. Later on and after he had been associated with James A. Bailey, his one great drawing card was the great elephant Jumbo. Jumbo we will have to credit James A. Bailey, for it was through his efforts that he was secured.

Adam Forepaugh's first great attraction, and this was while he was still in the wagon show business, was his great menagerie of fifty-two cages, which with all his big tableaux and baggage wagons, took more than 300 horses to transport over the country. But his one big money maker came later when he conceived the idea of bringing out the handsomest woman in the world known as the \$10,000 beauty, Louise Montague. This, next to Jumbo, was the show's drawing card in the history of show business.

James A. Bailey was also the originator and the first man to build the

three rings and two platforms in the great circus tent. Another big year in the show business was what was known as the white elephant season and at that time both the Forepaugh and the Barnum show claimed the original and only white elephant ever brought to this country. And it was that year that both shows exhibited at the same time for weeks on Broad Street in Philadelphia. This season also proved to be big winners for both shows. With these great showmen the cost of what they believed to be an attraction and drawing card, cut but little figure.

W. W. Cole, although he never had a large show, had always had a good one. He was the one showman that always believed in printers ink. He was the greatest advertiser that ever was in the business in an early day. I remember well while with the Burr Robbins show in 1878, we had a few days opposition with the Cole show in Iowa, and it did not take us long to learn that we were up against a real show. For where we would get a half column advertisement in the newspaper, W. W. Cole would take the entire sheet, and where we would put up a twenty-five to thirty foot billboard, Mr. Cole would put one three or four times as large. And even in that day when shows were going overland by wagon, W. W. Cole advertised in the way that would be a credit to many of the big ones of today. So in our opposition with the Cole show in Iowa, Mr. Robbins soon made up his mind that he would have to get away from that part of the country in order to have any success. As there was plenty of country, we took to the tall timbers and the country where we could have it all to ourselves.

W. W. Cole also introduced the first electric lighted show tent in the country, and I think this was in the summer of 1872. And yet when I rehearse over these days of long ago, it seems almost like a dream to me; for although we traveled from California to Maine many times, yet it was no little good that we could get out of it as far as country was concerned. For, with me at least, it was work all day and well into the night, and for the acres we passed over and

the beautiful cities we showed in meant but little to the average person with the show. Many times since I have been out and away from the business, friends have said to me, "You have been in this city or that city," and would want to know all about it, and it was very little information that I could give them.

On Saturday of last week I had an old friend come from Rockford to spend the day with me, which he had been planning to do for some time. But as he was scarcely out of his teens when I had seen him last, and now his hair is ringed with gray and he is a few years about the half century mark, it is not strange that I did not know him. His name is Al Baker, and in 1880 he was a driver with the Burr Robbins show, Al's first and last season in the business. This was known as the rough season of all in wagon show business, for it rained almost constantly the first three weeks after we started out. In our visit Al Baker recalled many little incidents and happenings that I had long since forgotten. Al said that while he was bound to finish the season that year, the show had not been out so long until he had promised himself that this would be his last season in show business.

Mr. Baker has lived in Rockford for 18 years and all this time has been connected with the interurban roads of that city; and incidentally said that he liked it much better than driving four horses on a top heavy cage over the road on dark rainy nights. And while I had forgotten that such a man as Al Baker had ever been with the show, in all these years Al said that he had kept track

The front of the Bostock animal show. Pfening Archives.



of me and knew that I was still making my home in Janesville, and Al Baker is only one of many.

On Monday last, November 9, at White Plains, New York, the second suit over the millions left by James A. Bailey commenced. This promises to be a fight to the finish. Many showmen from all over the United States will be called in as witnesses. George Starr of London is also one of the witnesses, for Mr. Starr at the time of James A. Bailey's death was a part owner and manager of the Barnum show. When you come to think that there is more than five million to be divided and only three heirs, would you not think an equal division would be plenty for all? All this goes to two brothers and a sister of Mrs. Bailey, but for greed for gold, the two brothers want the lion's share.

Charles Cory, general manager of the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, accompanied by Mrs. Cory sails from New York, on the *Lusitania* for Europe on Wednesday of this week.

It is reported that two of the Hagenbeck boys have been killed in battle. The Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus management had, early in the season, placed a large order for animals with the Hagenbecks. Just what effect the war would have on this particular order had not been satisfactorily explained to the circus management. Knowing of other animals that were ready for delivery, Mr. Cory decided to go abroad and rush the delivery of the Hagenbeck animals if they were available or procure the shipment of several consignments of animals in the hand of other people that were known to be on the market. The steamship agencies advised the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus that if they wished to be sure of securing the transportation of the animals across the ocean, they had better attend to the transportation at once, as it was impossible to predict the status of ocean transportation conditions later in the winter on account of the unexpected developments of war movements. Mr. Cory expects to arrive home by the first of December. During his

absence Mr. Harvey is looking after business of the show and Jake Posey is in charge of the new winter quarters at the Carthage Fair Grounds, Cincinnati.

November 21, 1914

With the Forepaugh show, salaries were paid to the managers and performers every Wednesday, and every four weeks on that day there was a route card furnished to the people for four weeks in advance so that they might have plenty of time to write to their homes wherever they might be and have time to get an answer.

At this particular time Billy Burke, the famous clown, came to the wagon after his salary, and after giving it to him, I said, "Billy, here is the new route card for four weeks ahead."

Burke took the card and looked it over, and among the other one-day stands on the card it read, "Chicago, on the Lake Front for two weeks." Burke looked at it for a moment and he said, "Dave, I wish they would prohibit the circuses from showing in large cities. You know when I walk around the street and see the beautiful things in the windows of the different stores, I cannot keep from buying more or less of them, and by the time we are ready to leave Chicago, I find my roll is well depleted. And then the longer those big lights burn at night, the brighter they get, so that it is hard for me to tell just when to go to bed."

While Burke could see the humorous side of everything, yet in his quiet way when he would come to the ticket wagon, he would usually tell me about things in or around the show that was not to his liking. And yet everybody around the show was Burke's friend, and often at night near the loading place of the show, you could always find Burke surrounded with a lot of friends and telling them a new story he had heard during the day. So that he was not only a high-class clown, but always a good entertainer to his friends. When Billy Burke had a story to tell, everyone was willing to be a listener.

Many Janesville people will remember the wonderful lion act

given here at the Elk's Carnival several years ago by the Great Bostock animal show, and this act alone was the one great feature and drawing card at the carnival. This was not the only proof of the Bostock trained ani-



mals, for at that time they had several of them in different parts of the country with carnival companies and on vaudeville circuits. But everything in the Bostock company in Europe has taken a great change. Frank Bostock, the head of the concern, died some time ago. One of the trained and wild animals that are still held by the company in Europe. Many of these will go to the great park in Brooklyn, N. Y., and a few of the best trained ones were purchased and used on the road in this country. And this will at least wind up the Bostock company of trained animals for many years to come. I doubt if it will ever be revived again under the name Bostock.

A few days ago I had a letter from a friend in Chicago who is engaged in the booking business. In this he said: "You have no idea of the big demand for high class circuses for the fairs. We have already dated several fairs for 1915, and do you know that one of the big hits through the fairs this last year came from Delavan, Wis., and this was known as the Holland & Dockrill troupe of acrobats." Both the Holland and Dockrill's have been famous in the business for years. The father, Mr. Dockrill, at one time owned a quarter interest in the Barnum show and the mother at the time was one of the features of the Barnum show with her high-class menage horses.

Fred C. Collier, of this city, who has been in the show business for seven or eight years and most of the time been connected with the Rhoda Royal high school horses, spent several days here last week visiting his

father and incidentally told me a story of the happenings at Winnipeg, Canada, with the Sells-Floto and Buffalo Bill show which exhibited in that city two days this summer. The chief of police of the city of Winnipeg stationed many of his big "bobbies," as the policemen are called in that country, all around the outside of the big show. Just after the evening performance was over of the first day, the storm came up and a sharp clap of thunder and lightning came very near striking the big top and frightened the big elephants so that they pulled up the stakes they were chained to and went

on a rampage. They went from the menagerie into the big tent and, putting their trunks under the seats, threw them in every direction. The policemen all rushed inside to see what the entire disturbance meant. But when they saw the huge animals throw the seats in every direction they soon made a hasty retreat. The elephant man soon got them back into the menagerie again and soon had them all chained around in quiet range once more. Mr. Collier said that one of the big policemen tried to explain why they did not take part in getting the elephants together and in doing so said, "Of course, you understand we had the law on our side, but what good was that? We never had any experience in handling those kind of beasts, and we do when you come again you will have them better mannered, for Winnipeg police have no hankering for such work."

Rhoda Royal is at present at the Wellington Hotel in Chicago from where he will direct his different troupes of trained horses which he is sending out over the different vaudeville circuits. On Wednesday Fred Collier got a telegram to report in Chicago immediately, and he will have charge of one of these troupes of high classed horses, which will open next Monday at the Colonial theatre in Chicago and expects to be on the road most of the winter.

Mr. Collier has a saddle and bridle, which he bought this summer to use in his work for which he paid \$155. It is said to be one of the finest in the business. Wherever Royal's name appears on a theatre bill, it is a headliner and always means quality.

The following letter was sent to the Chief of Police of a town in South Carolina shortly before the Robinson Famous show was to appear in said town and was turned over to Wm. Kellogg, business manager of the show, by the chief: "Dear Sir: I am writing you to know if you have given away all of your special police badges, and if you have not, would like to know if you could let me wear one next Saturday. I do not want to do anything, just want to go through the show. With a big show like this you can use ten or twelve. Thanking you in advance for the above privilege, if you are in a position to grant it I am, yours very truly, Neil Thompson."

November 28, 1914

One of the hardest things for a manager to do in show business is to turn away people, and more especially in one day stands, where thousands of them are begging for admission with either the tickets or the money in their hands, and they tell you that they have come for miles and they don't care for a seat and are willing to give their money to take their chances on what they see.

In about the middle 80's with the Forepaugh show, we were showing in Omaha and at the matinee in the afternoon the crowd was enormous and hundreds of standing room tickets were sold. All of the extra seats, which they carried with the show, were put clear down to the ring bank, and then hundreds of people were standing up. And in the evening, long before the regular time of 7 o'clock, the ticket wagon was opened and the people commenced to come in every direction, and about half past six, I opened the ticket wagon with thousands outside clamoring for admission. The sixty-cent ticket sellers were busy, and the door tenders were taking more or less money at the door and it seemed that everybody in Omaha was circus crazy. After Mr. Forepaugh told them there was no more sitting room, they still begged for admission, and would push their half dollars into the door tenders hands and say, "We have come many



Part of the performers of the Miller and Arlington Wild West in 1914. Pfening Archives.

miles to see the show and will take our chances on what we can see."

It was my business to keep the ticket wagon opened and keep selling tickets until I was ordered from the main entrance of the show to close down. And so it went on until thousands of people were in the menagerie that had but little chance to get into the big top, and even get as much as a glimpse at the performance. But no word came to me to close down, so I kept on selling tickets until finally a big blue coat policeman ordered me to stop selling tickets. I asked him if he had bought the show, or if he was simply hired as a new manager. But he said in a second "I will show you my authority for closing this wagon," and he struck me across the arm with his club.

I never knew who struck him, but I got out of the melee with a slight bruise on the arm; but could see in a moment that things were not going smoothly at the front door. So I dropped down my ticket window, and gave the signal to the driver who was already on his seat ready to start, and we pulled out for the loading place at the railroad station.

Mr. Forepaugh had left for his car quite a little time before me, and when arrived at the railroad, I immediately went to his car to see if everything was all right. He smiled and said: "I am glad you got here all safe. That was surely some house that we have tonight."

This proved to be one of the largest houses of the season. There were thousands of people. While they were anxious to get in the show and take their chances, they found a world of

fault, and the next day the newspaper of Omaha had their inning. The things they said about Mr. Forepaugh and the management of the show was anything but complimentary. But do you not think any business-man, be it in merchandise of any kind or the circus, that on the big days when people are

clamoring to buy their wares, with their money in their hands ready to hand it to them and take their own chances on the goods, most of them would take their money and let them take their chances on everything proving satisfactory?

The next morning I bought an Omaha newspaper and showed it to Mr. Forepaugh, and after reading it he said "Oh, that will be all right. It will be two years before we come again, and most of it will be forgotten by that time. What money we did not make yesterday, we could not get today."

But in the one or two week stands this kind of service would not do. In the large cities, where we stayed one or two weeks when the seating capacity is sold, you have to close down or notify the people that you can sell them only standing room, and a limited amount of that.

This year above all others, I think, for 40 years back, the average performer, be it in hall show business or under the canvas tents, there has perhaps been more idle people in straightened circumstances than any time since they have known anything about the business. And it would seem that Thursday last, Thanksgiving Day, that these people have as much in their lives the past year to be thankful for as they ever had, and yet provisions for them are usually made in the large cities especially for some kind of a Thanksgiving dinner, and as these people have been used to the ups and downs of the business at different times, they have learned, as the saying goes, in time of adversity to bob up serenely and make the best of the circumstances. Many of them will rehearse over brighter days of the past and will be in hopes

of better times in the near future. But the moving picture shows and the closing of the big houses in the regular theatrical line, on which the average circus performer depended their winter engagements, are doing little business. And the season of 1914 will go down in history, in show business generally, as the black Friday of 1914.

P. T. Barnum and many others of the old school . . . did the frontier work of show business at that time. The one big item in their business for many years was their billboards, and to them belongs the credit of this kind in those early days. For this was the best way to bring themselves and their business before the people. Today in the larger cities this business of advertising on billboards has grown to be enormous, and you can scarcely pass a prominent four corners on the road where it has not got some kind of a billboard, even if it were the side of a barn or tobacco shed. This kind of advertising has come to be a big backer in the commercial world.

In those days they had to buy lumber outright and carried two carpenters with them to do the work; but today individuals in the city own the billboards and all the circus people have to [do] is carry their billposters.

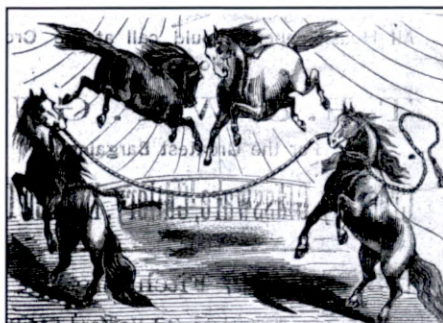
George Miller, of Miller Brothers' 101 Ranch, Bliss, Oklahoma, is in New York making purchases of supplies and munitions in the name of the government of Greece. Miller Bros. has been supplying some of the warring nations with horses—3,000 having gone to Greece and 10,000 to France. They still have a contract for several thousand horses for the British government, which Zach Miller made on leaving White City, Shepherd's Bush, London, where the 101 Ranch show was exhibiting at the outbreak of the war.

Miller Bros. & Arlington's 101 Ranch Wild West Show closed the season at Hot Springs, November 21, to and including the day, the show had given 373 performances, covered twenty states, visited 150 towns and traveled 9,022 miles. Two performances were given in every town except Columbia, S.C. The longest jump was 201 miles, and the shortest eight miles. The cars and equipment will be put in winter quarters at Hot

Springs, while the stock will be shipped to Miller Bros. Ranch, at Bliss, Oklahoma.

At a hospital in Cincinnati last week occurred the death of Fred Walton, who, for some years back was one of the famous four Waltons, acrobats, who had been with several of the big shows for several years back. When I first knew Fred Walton it was in the early 80's. At that time he gave the best portrayals of an English dude of any man in the country.

Fred was an Englishman and stood about six feet two inches. And when he was made up for his work with his



monocle on his eye, when he would make the rounds of the show and have his troubles at the ticket wagon at the main entrance of the show. And he'd always get the wrong seat in the reserves. When in all this trouble, Fred would try and enlist the sympathies of people around him, saying that he had paid his money in good faith and wanted a seat.

In those days Fred Walton's work was one of the features of the show, for which he received [a] good salary. Fred was known as a nice, clean gentleman, one that you would be proud to introduce anywhere as your friend, and belonged to what was known around the show as the "good fellowship club." Many of Fred Walton's friends all over the country will be grieved to hear of his death.

December 5, 1914

It was January 13, 1880, that Burr Robbins met with a terrible accident on the river at the Court Street bridge, and a few weeks later I was notified that I was the one that must get busy and arrange the show for the coming season. For it was well known that Burr Robbins would not be able to take any active part in the show much before the middle of the summer.

So I took up my abode at the winter quarters, and I was there early and late until the show was in readiness to take the road, which was about May first. For weeks before the show started out, people commenced to arrive at the winter quarters, and a few of them were old timers that had been there before. But many others would drop in thinking perhaps that they could get something to do, but only a few of them could be furnished work until time for the show to take the road.

This was my first year as manager of the show, and many a day I would stand in front of the little office on Eastern Avenue and watch these hobos, for hobos they were, many of them, during the winter, the most of whom were broke and hoping that they would get something to do to earn their board until the show was on the road. Ninety per cent of these people came on the bumpers or the blind baggage; and to look at, they were certainly not very high class. Many a time I wondered if I would be able to handle all those people and the show over the road, for that art was no small matter in the days of the wagon show.

Some time before we were to open, all the wagons were painted and in fine shape, the horses had been mated and the harnesses were all in repair. It was then that I commenced to feel proud of my achievements thus far as manager of the show for the first time.

The show was to open at Delavan, Wisconsin, on Monday, and the Saturday before I told Mr. Robbins that I would have the show hitched just as it would be taken over the road, every wagon, tableau and cage in its place, and would have them driven past his house where he could sit in an easy chair and watch them from the bay window. I told him that I knew of nothing more that could be done, that the boss canvasman, Tom Fay, had his canvas and seats all in fine shape and the property men had their wagons all loaded, just as they would be taken over the road.

About two o'clock in the afternoon the parade started in through the yard to the house where Mr. Robbins was to pass judgment on the fitness of the show for the season. Everything was in perfect order,

until one of the wagons passed by. He noticed one of the chains on the wagon was a little shorter than the other. This seemed to be of enough importance to start the ball rolling. After many other harsh things were said to me by Mr. Robbins, he finally wound up by saying: "You are not worth the room that you take up around the show for a manager, and I will have a man in your place next season if I have to pay him \$1,000 a week."

Of course, as this was a trifle more than he was paying me, I made up my mind that probably would be my last season. But this was not the last curtain lecture that I received from Burr Robbins; for some six or seven weeks later he came up with the show and the things that he did not approve of were many. He was not at all backward in telling me so.

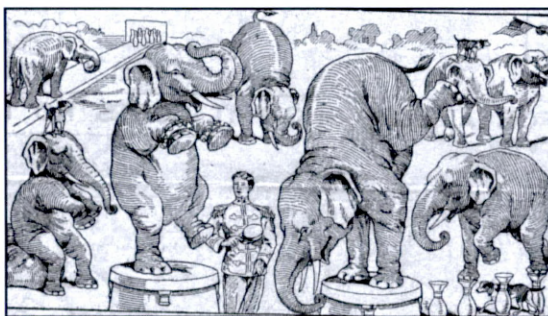
But at that I kept on sawing wood and asking no advice of any one, but doing what I knew was exactly right and had to be done, and let the curtain lectures come as they might.

Occasionally I would take an inning myself, and tell him a few things that you would be a long time hearing from a pulpit.

These disapprovals from both sides seem to be a necessity in the business. Perhaps it is so in many other lines of business that the proprietor hands it to the head clerk, and he passes it along down until it finally lands on the boy who sweeps out. It was darkness like this that made us enjoy the brighter lights when they came.

The early part of this season in the business was the hardest of all that I ever experienced. It rained almost constantly for the first three weeks, and if at any time it would stop raining for an hour or two, it would apologize and start right in again. For three days, every night we would have what was called a pack-up breakfast and be on the road for the next town at 10 o'clock at night. At times it was almost impossible to keep men enough to put up the canvas and drive the teams over the road. Yet with this, the worst possible weather, the show was doing a big business every day.

It rained so often that the farmers could not work, and many people in the city would wonder how we could



possibly give a show in the afternoon under such circumstances. So they seemed to come to see how it was done.

It was this same spring that we showed in Rochelle, Ill., and were going to DeKalb that night. We pulled off the lot at Rochelle at 9:30 at night and at daylight the next morning we were only a mile and half out of town. We got back into town, shipped all the heavy canvas and wagons by train, and took the better roads around what they called the prairie road, which was 32 miles in place of 18, which was the direct road.

We arrived in DeKalb the next afternoon about 2 o'clock, opened up the show at 4, and while we only gave one performance, we took more money than the show had ever taken there in two performances. While Burr Robbins and I had our differences many times during the five years that I was with him, he was known among show people to be one of the best cross road showmen in the business, and for that matter the fortune he had amassed in the years he was in the business tells its own story.

It was only a few years later while with the Adam Forepaugh show we were showing on the lake front in Chicago and every afternoon and evening turning away thousands of people—that one evening Burr Robbins came to the lake front with three friends whom he wanted to see this "old steady" sell tickets. I was at that time supposed to be the fastest, and it was with pride that Burr Robbins would tell these friends that he was the man that started me in the business. Many a time when I first started out we would have a big crowd, Burr Robbins would stand by the wheel of the wagon and find a world of fault because I could not sell

faster and called me a few names which I would not have recognized had I been out of the business.

So many people have said to me: "Dave, you must have kept a diary of the happenings of each year with the show or you could not be able to relate so many of them."

But I never kept a diary, not even for a week, and when I was out and away from the business I had not so much as a season's route book to remind me of the opening and closing of even one season. But I think all through life, even though you are not in the show business, there are always many happenings that are indelibly etched on your memory so that you never forget.

At the LaCrosse hospital on November 7th occurred the death of Fred Fisher, who for more than 25 years was prominent in circus business. I traveled several seasons with Fred in the middle 80's. He was the head of what was known as the "Flying Fishers."

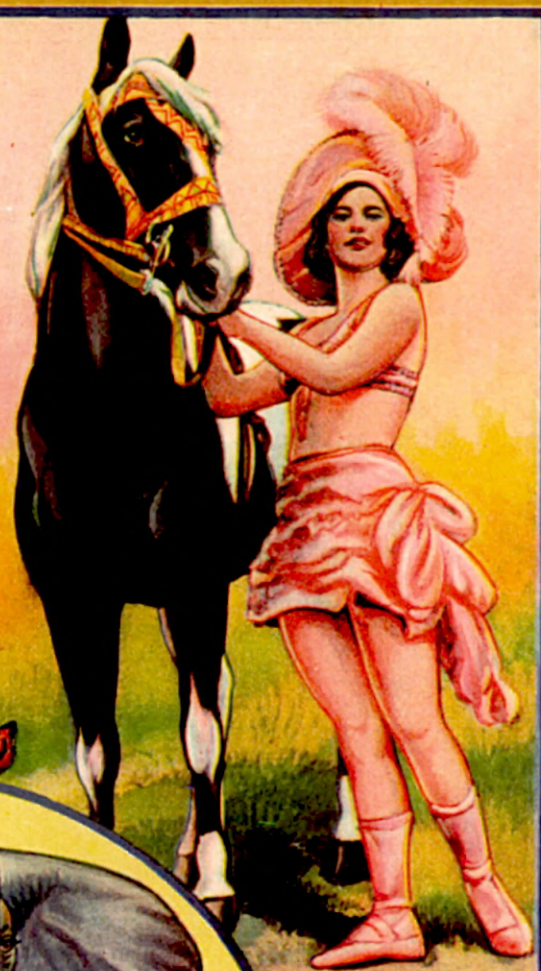
Fred was the manager and did the catching of his brother, who turned a double somersault from one side of the canvas to the other. In their time [it] was as high class an act as any one in the business. Along either in '89 or '90, Fred missed catching the brother; and while they worked with a net under them, he was coming with such force that he went over the net and struck the stakes at the side of the ring bank and died that same night.

This broke up the act of the "Flying Fishers," but Fred Fisher stood so well with the show that Adam Forepaugh gave him a position at the front door as ticket taker and kind of an assistant manager, which place he filled until the death of Adam Forepaugh. And I think that he stayed for a few years later.

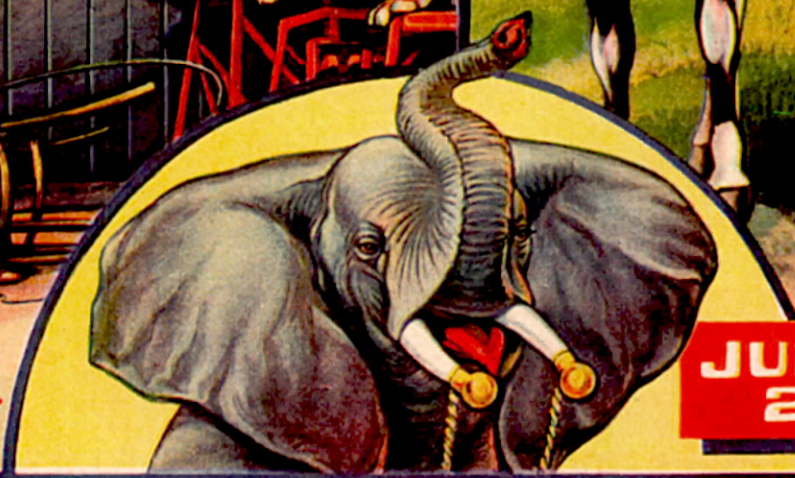
Fred Fisher for some time had been connected with the Hotel LaCrosse and it was there that he was taken sick and taken to the hospital, [where he] died a few days later. The remains were buried at Oak Grove Cemetery at LaCrosse on November 9th, and but few men in show business stood higher in estimation of their comrades and managers than did Fred Fisher.

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